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THE DALTONS

Frontispiece.

THE DALTONS

OR

THREE ROADS IN LIFE

BY

CHARLES LEVER

AUTHOR OF "CHARLES O'MALLEY"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

VOL. I.

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS
THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE
NEW YORK: 416, BROOME STREET

LONDON:
WOODFALL AND KINDER, PRINTERS,
MILFORD LANE, STRAND, W.C.

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PREFACE.

If the original conception of this tale was owing to the story of an old and valued schoolfellow who took service in Austria, and rose to rank and honours there, all the rest was purely fictitious. My friend had made a deep impression on my mind by his narratives of that strange life, wherein, in the very midst of our modern civilization, an old-world tradition still has its influence, making the army of to-day the veritable sons and descendants of those who grouped around the bivouac fires in Wallenstein's camp. Of that more than Oriental submission—that graduated deference to military rank—that chivalrous devotion to the "Kaiser" which enter into the soldier heart of Austria, I have been unable to reproduce any but the very faintest outlines, and yet these were the traits which pervaded all my friend's stories and gave them character and distinctiveness.

Many of the other characters in this tale were drawn from the life, with such changes—added and omitted features—as might rescue them from any charge of personality. With all my care on this score, one or two have been believed to be recognizable; and if so I have only to hope that I have touched on peculiarities of disposition

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inoffensively, and only depicted such traits as may "point a moral," without wounding the possessor.

The last portion of the story includes some scenes from the Italian campaign, which had just come to a close while I was writing. If a better experience of Italy than I then possessed might modify some of the opinions I entertained at that time, and induce me to form some conclusions at least at variance with those I then expressed, I still prefer to leave the whole unaltered, lest in changing I might injure the impression under which the fulness of my once conviction had impelled me to pronounce.

Writing these lines now, while men's hearts are throbbing anxiously for the tidings any day may produce, and when the earth is already tremulous under the march of distant squadrons, I own that even the faint, weak picture of that struggle in this story appeals to myself with a more than common interest. I have no more to add than my grateful acknowledgments to such as still hold me in their favour, and to write myself their devoted servant,

CHARLES LEVER.

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THE DALTONS;

OR,

Three Roads in Life.

CHAPTER I.

BADEN OUT OF SEASON.

A THEATRE by daylight—a great historical picture in the process of cleaning—a ballet-dancer of a wet day hastening to rehearsal—the favourite for the Oaks dead-lame in a straw-yard—are scarcely more stripped of their legitimate illusions than is a fashionable watering-place on the approach of winter. The gay shops and stalls of flaunting wares are closed; the promenades, lately kept in trimmest order, are weed-grown and neglected; the "sear and yellow leaves" are fluttering and rustling along the alleys where "Beauty's step was wont to tread." Both music and fountains have ceased to play; the very statues are putting on great overcoats of snow, while the orange-trees file off like a sad funeral procession to hide themselves in dusky sheds till the coming spring.

You see as you look around you that nature has been as unreal as art itself; and that all the bright hues of foliage and flower—all the odours that floated from bed and parterre—all the rippling flow of stream and fountain,

have been just as artistically devised, and as much "got up," as the transparencies, or the Tyrolese singers, the fireworks, or the fancy fair, or any other of those ingenious "spectacles" which amuse the grown children of fashion. The few who yet linger seem to have undergone a strange transmutation. The smiling landlord of the "Adler"—we refer particularly to Germany as the very land of watering-places—is a half-sulky, farmer-looking personage, busily engaged in storing up his Indian corn, and his firewood and his forage, against the season of snows. The bland "croupier," on whose impassive countenance no shade of fortune was able to mark even a passing emotion, is now seen higgling with a peasant for a sack of charcoal, in all the eagerness of avarice. The trim maiden, whose golden locks and soft blue eyes made the bouquets she sold seem fairer to look on, is a stout wench, whose uncouth fur cap and wooden shoes are the very antidotes to romance. All the transformations take the same sad colours. It is a pantomime read backwards.

Such was Baden-Baden in the November of 182—. Some weeks of bad and broken weather had scattered and dispersed all the gay company. The hotels and assembly-rooms were closed for the winter. The ball-room, which so lately was alight with a thousand tapers, was now barricaded like a gaol. The very post-office, around which each morning an eager and pressing crowd used to gather, was shut up—one small aperture alone remaining, as if to show to what a fraction all correspondence had been reduced. The Hôtel de Russie was the only house open in the little town; but although the door lay ajar, no busy throng of waiters, no lamps, invited the traveller to believe a hospitable reception might await him within. A very brief glance inside would soon have dispelled any such illusion had it ever existed. The wide staircase, formerly lined with orange-trees and camellias, was stripped of all its bright foliage; the marble statues were removed; the great thermometer, whose crystal decorations had arrested many a passing look, was now encased within a wooden box, as if its tell-tale face might reveal unpleasant truths, if left exposed.

The spacious "Saal," where some eighty guests assem-

bled every day, was denuded of all its furniture, mirrors, and lustres; bronzes and pictures were gone, and nothing remained but a huge earthenware stove, within whose grating a faded nosegay—left there in summer—defied all speculations as to a fire.

In this comfortless chamber three persons now paraded with that quick step and brisk motion that bespeak a walk for warmth and exercise; for dismal as it was within doors, it was still preferable to the scene without, where a cold incessant rain was falling, that, on the hills around, took the form of snow. The last lingerers at a watering-place, like those who cling on to a wreck, have usually something peculiarly sad in their aspect. Unable, as it were, to brave the waves like strong swimmers, they hold on to the last with some vague hope of escape, and like a shipwrecked crew, drawing closer to each other in adversity than in more prosperous times, they condescend now to acquaintance, and even intimacy, where, before, a mere nod of recognition was alone interchanged. Such were the three who now, buttoned up to the chin, and with hands deeply thrust into side-pockets, paced backwards and forwards, sometimes exchanging a few words, but in that broken and discursive fashion that showed that no tie of mutual taste or companionship had bound them together.

The youngest of the party was a small and very slightly made man of about five or six-and-twenty, whose face, voice, and figure were almost feminine, and, only for a very slight line of black moustache, might have warranted the suspicion of a disguise. His lacquered boots and spotless yellow gloves appeared somewhat out of season, as well as the very light textured coat which he wore; but Mr. Albert Jekyl had been accidentally detained at Baden, waiting for that cruel remittance which—whether the sin be that of agent or relative—is ever so slow of coming. That he bore the inconvenience admirably (and without the slightest show of impatience) it is but fair to confess, and whatever chagrin either the detention, the bad weather, or the solitude may have occasioned, no vestige of discontent appeared upon features where a look of practised courtesy, and a most bland smile, gave the pre-

dominant expression. "Who he was," or, in other words, whence he came—of what family—with what fortune, pursuits, or expectations, we are not ashamed to confess our utter ignorance, seeing that it was shared by all those that tarried that season at Baden, with whom, however, he lived on terms of easy and familiar intercourse.

The next to him was a bilious-looking man, somewhat past the middle of life, with that hard and severe cast of features that rather repels than invites intimacy. In figure he was compactly and stoutly built, his step as he walked and his air as he stood showed one whose military training had given the whole tone to his character. Certain strong lines about the mouth, and a peculiar puckering of the angles of the eyes, boded a turn for sarcasm, which all his instincts, and they were Scotch ones, could not completely repress. His voice was loud, sharp, and ringing; the voice of a man who, when he said a thing, would not brook being asked to repeat it. That Colonel Haggerstone knew how to be sapling as well as oak, was a tradition among those who had served with him; still it is right to add, that his more congenial mood was the imperative, and that which he usually practised. The accidental lameness of one of his horses had detained him some weeks at Baden, a durance which assuredly appeared to push his temper to its very last intrenchments.

The third representative of forlorn humanity was a very tall, muscular man, whose jockey-cut green coat and wide-brimmed hat contrasted oddly with a pair of huge white moustaches, that would have done credit to a captain of the Old Guard. On features, originally handsome, time, poverty, and dissipation had left many a mark; but still the half droll, half truculent twinkle of his clear grey eyes showed him one whom no turn of fortune could thoroughly subdue, and who, even in the very hardest of his trials, could find heart to indulge his humour—for Peter Dalton was an Irishman; and although many years an absentee, held the dear island and its prejudices as green in his memory as though he had left it but a week before.

Such were the three—who, without one sympathy in

common, without a point of contact in character—were now drawn into a chance acquaintance by the mere accident of bad weather. Their conversation—if such it could be called—showed how little progress could be made in intimacy by those whose roads in life lie apart. The bygone season, the company, the play-table and its adventures, were all discussed so often, that nothing remained but the weather. That topic, so inexhaustible to Englishmen, however, offered little variety now, for it had been uniformly bad for some weeks past.

"Where do you propose to pass the winter, sir?" said Haggerstone to Jekyl, after a somewhat lengthy lamentation over the probable condition of all the Alpine passes.

"I've scarcely thought of it yet," simpered out the other, with his habitual smile. "There's no saying where one ought to pitch his tent till the Carnival opens."

"And you, sir?" asked Haggerstone of his companion on the other side.

"Upon my honour, I don't know then," said Dalton; "but I wouldn't wonder if I stayed here, or hereabouts."

"Here!—why, this is Tobolsk, sir!—you surely couldn't mean to pass a winter here?"

"I once knew a man who did it," interposed Jekyl, blandly. "They cleaned him out at 'the tables;' and so he had nothing for it but to remain. He made rather a good thing of it, too; for it seems these worthy people, however conversant with the great arts of ruin, had never seen the royal game of thimble-rig; and Frank Mathews walked into them all, and contrived to keep himself in beetroot and boiled beef by his little talents."

"Wasn't that the fellow who was broke at Kilmagund?" croaked Haggerstone.

"Something happened to him in India; I never well knew what," simpered Jekyl. "Some said he had caught the cholera; others, that he had got into the Company's service."

"By way of a mishap, sir, I suppose," said the colonel, tartly.

"He wouldn't have minded it, in the least. For certain," resumed the other, coolly, "he was a sharp-witted fellow; always ready to take the tone of any society."

The colonel's cheek grew yellower, and his eyes sparkled with an angrier lustre; but he made no rejoinder.

"That's the place to make a fortune, I'm told," said Dalton. "I hear there's not the like of it all the world over."

"Or to spend one," added Haggerstone, curtly.

"Well, and why not?" replied Dalton. "I'm sure it's as pleasant as saving—barring a man's a Scotchman."

"And if he should be, sir?—and if he were one that now stands before you?" said Haggerstone, drawing himself proudly up, and looking the other sternly in the face.

"No offence—no offence in life. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Sure, a man can't help where he's going to be born."

"I fancy we'd all have booked ourselves for a cradle in Buckingham Palace," interposed Jekyl, "if the matter were optional."

"Faith! I don't think so," broke in Dalton. "Give me back Corrig-O'Neal, as my grandfather Pearce had it, with the whole barony of Kilmurray-O'Mahon, two packs of hounds, and the first cellar in the county, and to the devil I'd fling all the royal residences ever I seen."

"The sentiment is scarcely a loyal one, sir," said Haggerstone, "and, as one wearing his Majesty's cloth, I beg to take the liberty of reminding you of it."

"Maybe it isn't;—and what then?" said Dalton, over whose good-natured countenance a passing cloud of displeasure lowered.

"Simply, sir, that it shouldn't be uttered in *my* presence," said Haggerstone.

"Phew!" said Dalton, with a long whistle. "Is that what you're at? See, now"—here he turned fully round, so as to face the colonel—"see, now; I'm the dullest fellow in the world at what is called 'taking a thing up;' but make it clear for me—let me only see what is pleasing to the company, and it isn't Peter Dalton will balk your fancy."

"May I venture to remark," said Jekyl, blandly, "that you are both in error, and however I may (the cold of

the season being considered) envy your warmth, it is after all only so much caloric needlessly expended."

"I wasn't choleric at all," broke in Dalton, mistaking the word, and thus happily, by the hearty laugh his blunder created, bringing the silly altercation to an end.

"Well," said Haggerstone, "since we are all so perfectly agreed in our sentiments, we couldn't do better than dine together, and have a bumper to the King's health."

"I always dine at two, or half-past," simpered Jekyl: "besides, I'm on a regimen, and never drink wine."

"There's nobody likes a bit of conviviality better than myself," said Dalton; "but I've a kind of engagement—a promise I made this morning."

There was an evident confusion in the way these words were uttered, which did not escape either of the others, who exchanged the most significant glances as he spoke.

"What have we here?" cried Jekyl, as he sprang to the window and looked out. "A courier, by all that's muddy! Who could have expected such an apparition at this time?"

"What can bring people here now?" said Haggerstone, as with his glass to his eye he surveyed the little well-fed figure, who, in his tawdry jacket all slashed with gold, and heavy jack-boots, was closely locked in the embraces of the landlord.

Jekyl at once issued forth to learn the news, and, although not fully three minutes absent, returned to his companions with a full account of the expected arrivals.

"It's that rich banker, Sir Stafford Onslow, with his family. They were on their way to Italy, and made a mess of it somehow in the Black Forest—they got swept away by a torrent, or crushed by an avalanche, or something of the kind, and Sir Stafford was seized with the gout, and so they've put back, glad even to make such a port as Baden."

"If it's the gout's the matter with him," said Dalton, "I've the finest receipt in the world. Take a pint of spirits—poteen if you can get it—beat up two eggs and a pat of butter in it; throw in a clove of garlic and a few

scrapings of horseradish, let it simmer over the fire for a minute or two, stir it with a sprig of rosemary to give it a flavour, and then drink it off."

"Gracious Heaven! what a dose!" exclaimed Jekyl, in horror.

"Well, then, I never knew it fail. My father took it for forty years, and there wasn't a haler man in the country. If it wasn't that he gave up the horseradish—for he didn't like the taste of it—he'd, maybe, be alive at this hour."

"The cure was rather slow of operation," said Haggerstone, with a sneer.

"'Twas only the more like all remedies for Irish grievances, then," observed Dalton, and his face grew a shade graver as he spoke.

"Who was it this Onslow married?" said the colonel, turning to Jeykl.

"One of the Headworths, I think."

"Ah, to be sure; Lady Hester. She was a handsome woman when I saw her first, but she fell off sadly, and indeed, if she had not, she'd scarcely have condescended to an alliance with a man in trade, even though he were Sir Gilbert Stafford."

"Sir Gilbert Stafford!" repeated Dalton.

"Yes, sir; and now Sir Gilbert Stafford Onslow. He took the name from that estate in Warwickshire. Skepton Park, I believe they call it."

"By my conscience, I wish that was the only thing he took," ejaculated Dalton, with a degree of fervour that astonished the others, "for he took an elegant estate that belonged by right to my wife. Maybe you have heard tell of Corrig-O'Neal?"

Haggerstone shook his head, while with his elbow he nudged his companion, to intimate his total disbelief in the whole narrative.

"Surely you must have heard of the murder of Arthur Godfrey, of Corrig-O'Neal; wasn't the whole world ringing with it?"

Another negative sign answered this appeal.

"Well, well, that beats all ever I heard! but so it is, sorrow bit they care in England if we all murdered each

other! Arthur Godfrey, as I was saying, was my wife's brother—there were just the two of them, Arthur and Jane—she was my wife."

"Ah! here they come!" exclaimed Jekyl, not sorry for the event which so opportunely interrupted Dalton's unpromising history. And now a heavy travelling-carriage, loaded with imperials and beset with boxes, was dragged up to the door by six smoking horses. The courier and the landlord were immediately in attendance, and after a brief delay the steps were lowered, and a short, stout man, with a very red face, and a very yellow wig, descended, and assisted a lady to alight. She was a tall woman, whose figure and carriage were characterized by an air of fashion. After her came a younger lady; and lastly—moving with great difficulty, and showing by his worn looks and enfeebled frame the suffering he had endured—came a very thin, mild-looking man of about sixty. Leaning upon the arm of the courier at one side, and of his stout companion, whom he called Doctor, at the other, he slowly followed the ladies into the house. They had scarcely disappeared when a calèche, drawn by three horses at a sharp gallop, drew up, and a young fellow sprang out, whose easy gestures and active movements showed that all the enjoyments of wealth, and all the blandishments of fashion, had not undermined the elastic vigour of body which young Englishmen owe to the practice of field sports.

"This place quite deserted, I suppose," cried he, addressing the landlord. "No one here?"

"No one, sir. All gone," was the reply.

Haggerstone's head shook with a movement of impatience as he heard this remark, disparaging, as it was, to his own importance; but he said nothing, and resumed his walk as before.

"Our Irish friend is gone away, I perceive," said Jekyl, as he looked around in vain for Dalton. "Do you believe all that story of the estate he told us?"

"Not a syllable of it, sir. I never yet met an Irishman—and it has been my lot to know some scores of them—who had not been cheated out of a magnificent property, and was not related to half the peerage to boot.

Now, I take it that our highly-connected friend is rather out at elbows!" And he laughed his own peculiar hard laugh, as though the mere fancy of another man's poverty was something inconceivably pleasant and amusing.

"Dinner, sir," said the waiter, entering and addressing the colonel.

"Glad of it," cried he; "it's the only way to kill time in this cursed place;" and so saying, and without the ceremony of a good-bye to his companion, the colonel bustled out of the room with a step intended to represent extreme youth and activity. "That gentleman dines at two?" asked he of the waiter, as he followed him up the stairs.

"He has not dined at all, *sir*, for some days back," said the waiter. "A cup of coffee in the morning, and a biscuit, are all that he takes."

The colonel made an expressive gesture by turning out the lining of his pocket.

"Yes, sir," replied the other, significantly; "very much that way, I believe." And with that he uncovered the soup, and the colonel arranged his napkin and prepared to dine.

CHAPTER II.

AN HUMBLE INTERIOR.

When Dalton parted from his companions at the "Russie," it was to proceed by many an intricate and narrow passage to a remote part of the upper town, where close to the garden wall of the Ducal Palace stood, and still stands, a little solitary two-storied house, framed in wood, and the partitions displaying some very faded traces of fresco painting. Here was the well-known shop of a toy-maker; and although now closely barred and shuttered, in summer many a gay and merry troop of children devoured with eager eyes the treasures of Hans Roëckle.

Entering a dark and narrow passage beside the shop, Dalton ascended the little creaking stairs which led to the second story. The landing-place was covered with firewood, great branches of newly-hewn beech and oak, in the midst of which stood a youth, hatchet in hand, busily engaged in chopping and splitting the heavy masses around him. The flush of exercise upon his cheek suited well the character of a figure which, clothed only in shirt and trousers, presented a perfect picture of youthful health and symmetry.

"Tired, Frank?" asked the old man, as he came up.

"Tired, father! not a bit of it. I only wish I had as much more to split for you, since the winter will be a cold one."

"Come in and sit down boy, now," said the father, with a slight tremor as he spoke. "We cannot have many more opportunities of talking together. To-morrow is the 28th of November."

"Yes; and I must be in Vienna by the fourth, so uncle Stephen writes."

"You must not call him uncle, Frank, he forbids it himself; besides, he is my uncle, and not yours. My father and he were brothers, but never saw each other

after fifteen years of age, when the Count—that's what we always called him—entered the Austrian service, so that we are all strangers to each other."

"His letter doesn't show any lively desire for a closer intimacy," said the boy, laughing. "A droll composition it is, spelling and all."

"He left Ireland when he was a child, and lucky he was to do so," sighed Dalton, heavily; "I wish I had done the same."

The chamber into which they entered was, although scrupulously clean and neat, marked by every sign of poverty. The furniture was scanty and of the humblest kind. The table linen such as used by the peasantry, while the great jug of water that stood on the board seemed the very climax of narrow fortune in a land where the very poorest are wine-drinkers.

A small knapsack with a light travelling-cap on it, and a staff beside it, seemed to attract Dalton's eyes as he sat down. "It is but a poor equipment, that yonder, Frank," said he at last, with a forced smile.

"The easier carried," replied the lad, gaily.

"Very true," sighed the other. "You must make the journey on foot."

"And why not, father? Of what use all this good blood, of which I have been told so often and so much, if it will not enable a man to compete with the low-born peasant. And see how well this knapsack sits," cried he, as he threw it on his shoulder. "I doubt if the Emperor's pack will be as pleasant to carry."

"So long as you haven't to carry a heavy heart, boy," said Dalton, with deep emotion, "I believe no load is too much."

"If it were not for leaving you and the girls, I never could be happier, never more full of hope, father. Why should not *I* win my way upward as Count Stephen has done? Loyalty and courage are not the birthright of only one of our name!"

"Bad luck was all the birthright ever I inherited," said the old man, passionately; "bad luck in everything I touched through life! Where others grew rich, I became a beggar; where *they* found happiness, *I* met misery and

ruin! But it's not of this I ought to be thinking now," cried he, changing his tone. "Let us see, where are the girls?" And so saying, he entered a little kitchen which adjoined the room, and where, engaged in the task of preparing the dinner, was a girl, who, though several years older, bore a striking resemblance to the boy. Over features that must once have been the very type of buoyant gaiety, years of sorrow and suffering had left their deep traces, and the dark circles around the eyes betrayed how deeply she had known affliction. Ellen Dalton's figure was faulty for want of height in proportion to her size, but had another and more grievous defect in a lameness, which made her walk with the greatest difficulty. This was the consequence of an accident when riding, a horse having fallen upon her and fractured the hip-bone. It was said, too, that she had been engaged to be married at the time, but that her lover, shocked by the disfigurement, had broken off the match, and thus made this calamity the sorrow of a life long.

"Where's Kate?" said the father, as he cast a glance around the chamber.

Ellen drew near, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Not in this dreadful weather; surely, Ellen, you didn't let her go out in such a night as this?"

"Hush!" murmured she, "Frank will hear you; and remember, father, it is his last night with us."

"Couldn't old Andy have found the place?" asked Dalton; and as he spoke, he turned his eyes to a corner of the kitchen, where a little old man sat in a straw chair peeling turnips, while he croned a ditty to himself in a low sing-song tone; his thin wizened features, browned by years and smoke, his small scratch wig, and the remains of an old scarlet hunting-coat that he wore, giving him the strongest resemblance to one of the monkeys one sees in a street exhibition.

"Poor Andy!" cried Ellen, "he'd have lost his way twenty times before he got to the bridge."

"Faith, then, he must be greatly altered," said Dalton, "for I've seen him track a fox for twenty miles of ground, when not a dog of the pack could come on the trace. Eh, Andy!" cried he, aloud, and stooping down so as to

be heard by the old man, "do you remember the cover at Corralin?"

"Don't ask him, father," said Ellen, eagerly; "he cannot sleep for the whole night after his old memories have been awakened."

The spell, however, had begun to work; and the old man, letting fall both knife and turnip, placed his hands on his knees, and in a weak reedy treble began a strange monotonous kind of air, as if to remind himself of the words, which, after a minute or two, he remembered thus:—

"There was old Tom Whaley,
And Anthony Baillie,
And Fitzgerald, the Knight of Glynn,
And Father Clare,
On his big brown mare,
That mornin' at Corralin!"

"Well done, Andy! well done!" exclaimed Dalton. "You're as fresh as a four-year-old."

"Iss!" said Andy, and went on with his song.

"And Miles O'Shea,
On his cropped tail bay,
Was soon seen ridin' in.
He was vexed and crossed
At the light hoar frost,
That mornin' at Corralin."

"Go on, Andy! go on, my boy!" exclaimed Dalton, in a rapture at the words that reminded him of many a day in the field and many a night's carouse. "What comes next?"

"Ay!" cried Andy.

"Says he, 'When the wind
Laves no scent behind,
To keep the dogs out's a sin;
I'll be d—d if I stay,
To lose my day,
This mornin' at Corralin.'

But ye see he was out in his reck'nin'!" cried Andy; "for, as if—

"To give him the lie,
There rose a cry,
As the hounds came yelpin' in;
And from every throat
There swelled one note,
That mornin' at Corralin."

A fit of coughing, brought on by a vigorous attempt to imitate the cry of a pack, here closed Andy's minstrelsy; and Ellen, who seemed to have anticipated some such catastrophe, now induced her father to return to the sitting-room, while she proceeded to use those principles of domestic medicine—clapping on the back and cold water—usually deemed of efficacy in like cases.

"There now, no more singing, but take up your knife and do what I bade you," said she, affecting an air of rebuke; while the old man, whose perceptions did not rise above those of a spaniel, hung down his head in silence. At the same moment the outer door of the kitchen opened, and Kate Dalton entered. Taller and several years younger than her sister, she was in the full pride of that beauty of which blue eyes and dark hair are the chief characteristics, and is deemed by many as peculiarly Irish. Delicately fair, and with features regular as a Grecian model, there was a look of brilliant, almost of haughty, defiance about her, to which her gait and carriage seemed to contribute; nor could the humble character of her dress, where strictest poverty declared itself, disguise the sentiment.

"How soon you're back, dearest," said Ellen, as she took off the dripping cloak from her sister's shoulders.

"And only think, Ellen, I was obliged to go to Lichtenthal, where little Hans spends all his evenings in the winter season, at the 'Hahn!' And just fancy his gallantry! He would see me home, and would hold up the umbrella, too, over my head, although it kept his own arm at full stretch; while, by the pace we walked, I did as much for his legs. It is very ungrateful to laugh at him, for he said a hundred pretty things to me,—about my courage to venture out in such weather,—about my accent as I spoke German,—and lastly, in praise of my skill as a sculptor. Only fancy, Ellen, what a humiliation for me to confess

that these pretty devices were yours, and not mine; and that my craft went no further than seeking for the material which your genius was to fashion."

"Genius, Kate!" exclaimed Ellen, laughing. "Has Master Hans been giving you a lesson in flattery; but tell me of your success—which has he taken?"

"All—everything!" cried Kate; "for although at the beginning the little fellow would select one figure and then change it for another, it was easy to see that he could not bring himself to part with any of them; now, sitting down in rapture before the 'Travelling Student,'—now, gazing delightedly at the 'Charcoal-Burners,'—but all his warmest enthusiasm bursting forth as I produced the 'Forest Maiden at the Well.' He did, indeed, think the 'Pedlar' too handsome, but he found no such fault with the Maiden: and here, dearest—here are the proceeds, for I told him that we must have ducats in shining gold for Frank's new crimson purse; and here they are;" and she held up a purse of gay colours, through whose meshes the bright metal glittered.

"Poor Hans!" said Ellen, feelingly. "It is seldom that so humble an artist meets so generous a patron."

"He's coming to-night," said Kate, as she smoothed down the braids of her glossy hair before a little glass—"he's coming to say good-bye to Frank."

"He is so fond of Frank."

"And of Frank's sister Nelly; nay, no blushing, dearest; for myself, I am free to own admiration never comes amiss, even when offered by as humble a creature as the dwarf, Hans Roëckle."

"For shame, Kate, for shame! It is this idle vanity that stifles honest pride, as rank weeds destroy the soil for wholesome plants to live in."

"It is very well for you, Nelly, to talk of pride, but poor things like myself are fain to content themselves with the baser metal, and even put up with vanity! There, now, no sermons, no seriousness; I'll listen to nothing to-day that savours of sadness, and, as I hear pa and Frank laughing, I'll be of the party."

The glance of affection and admiration which Ellen bestowed upon her sister was not unmixed with an ex-

pression of painful anxiety; and the sigh that escaped her told with what tender interest she watched over her.

The little dinner, prepared with more than usual care, at length appeared, and the family sat around the humble board with a sense of happiness dashed by one only reflection—that on the morrow Frank's place would be vacant.

Still each exerted himself to overcome the sadness of that thought, or even to dally with it, as one suggestive of pleasure; and when Ellen placed unexpectedly a great flask of Margräer before them to drink the young soldier's health, the zest and merriment rose to the highest. Nor was old Andy forgotten in the general joy. A large bumper of wine was put before him, and the door of the sitting-room left open, as if to let him participate in the merry noises that prevailed there. How naturally, and instinctively, too, their hopes gave colour to all they said, as they told each other that the occasion was a happy one! that dear Frank would soon be an officer, and of course distinguished by the favour of some one high in power; and lastly, they dwelt with such complacency on the affectionate regard and influence of "Count Stephen" as certain to secure the youth's advancement. They had often heard of the Count's great military fame, and the esteem in which he was held by the Court of Vienna; and now they speculated on the delight it would afford the old warrior—who had never been married himself—to have one like Frank, to assist by his patronage, and promote by his influence, and with such enthusiasm did they discuss the point, that at last they actually persuaded themselves that Frank's entering the service was a species of devotion to his relative's interest, by affording him an object worthy of his regard and affection.

While Ellen loved to dwell upon the great advantages of one who should be like a father to the boy, aiding him by wise counsel, and guiding him in every difficulty, Kate preferred to fancy the Count introducing Frank into all the brilliant society of the splendid capital, presenting him to those whose acquaintance was distinction, and at once launching him into the world of fashion and enjoyment. The promptitude with which he acceded to their father's application on Frank's behalf, was constantly

referred to as the evidence of his affectionate feeling for the family; and if his one solitary letter was of the very briefest and driest of all epistolary essays, they accounted for this—very naturally—by the length of time which had elapsed since he had either spoken or written his native language.

In the midst of these self-gratulations and pleasant fancies the door opened, and Hans Roëckle appeared, covered from head to foot by a light hoar frost, that made him look like the figure with which an ingenious confectioner sometimes decorates a cake. The dwarf stood staring at the signs of a conviviality so new and unexpected.

"Is this Christmas time, or Holy Monday, or the Three Kings' festival, or what is it, that I see you all feasting?" cried Hans, shaking the snow off his hat, and proceeding to remove a cloak which he had draped over his shoulder in most artistic folds.

"We were drinking Frank's health, Master Hans," said Dalton, "before he leaves us. Come over and pledge him too, and wish him all success, and that he may live to be a good and valued soldier of the Emperor."

Hans had by this time taken off his cloak, which, by mounting on a chair, he contrived to hang up, and now approached the table with great solemnity, a pair of immense boots of Russian leather, that reached to his hips, giving him a peculiarly cumbrous and heavy gait; but these, as well as a long vest of rabbit skins that buttoned close to the neck, made his invariable costume in the winter.

"I drink," said the dwarf, as, filling a bumper, he turned to each of the company severally—"I drink to the venerable father and the fair maidens, and the promising youth of this good family, and I wish them every blessing good Christians ought to ask for; but as for killing and slaying, for burning villages and laying waste cities, I've no sympathy with these."

"But you are speaking of barbarous times, Master Hans," said Kate, whose cheek mantled into scarlet as she spoke, "when to be strong was to be cruel, and when ill-disciplined hordes tyrannized over good citizens."

"I am talking of soldiers, such as the world has ever seen them," cried Hans, passionately; but of whose military experiences, it is but fair to say, his own little toy-shop supplied all the source. "What are they?" cried he, "but toys that never last, whether he who plays with them be child or kaiser! always getting smashed, heads knocked off here, arms and legs astray there; ay, and strangest of all, thought most of when most disabled! and then at last packed up in a box or a barrack, it matters not which, to be forgotten and seen no more! Hadst thou thought of something useful, boy—some good craft, a Jäger with a corkscrew inside of him, a tailor that turns into a pair of snuffers, a Dutch lady that makes a pin-cushion—these are toys people don't weary of—but a soldier! to stand ever thus"—and Hans shouldered the fire-shovel, and stood "at the present." "To wheel about so—walk ten steps here—ten back there—never so much as a glance at the pretty girl who is passing close beside you." Here he gave a look of such indescribable tenderness towards Kate, that the whole party burst into a fit of laughter. "They would have drawn me for the conscription," said Hans, proudly, "but I was the only son of a widow, and they could not."

"And are you never grieved to think what glorious opportunities of distinction have been thus lost to you?" said Kate, who, notwithstanding Ellen's imploring looks, could not resist the temptation of amusing herself with the dwarf's vanity.

"I have never suffered that thought to weigh upon me," cried Hans, with the most unsuspecting simplicity. "It is true, I might have risen to rank and honours; but how would they have suited *me*, or I *them?* Or how should I have made those dearest to me sharers in a fortune so unbecoming to us all? Think of poor Hans's old mother, if her son were to ask her blessing with a coat all glittering with stars and crosses; and then think of her as I have seen her, when I go, as I do every year, to visit her in the Bregentzer Wald, when she comes out to meet me with our whole village, proud of her son, and yet not ashamed of herself. That is glory—that is distinction enough for Hans Roëckle."

The earnestness of his voice, and the honest manliness of his sentiments, were more than enough to cover the venial errors of a vanity that was all simplicity. It is true that Hans saw the world only through the medium of his own calling, and that not a very exalted one; but still there went through all the narrowness of his views a tone of kindliness—a hearty spirit of benevolence, that made his simplicity at times rise into something almost akin to wisdom. He had known the Daltons as his tenants, and soon perceived that they were not like those rich English, from whom his countrymen derive such abundant gains. He saw them arrive at a season when all others were taking their departure, and detected in all their efforts at economy, not alone that they were poor, but, sadder still, that they were of those who seem never to accustom themselves to the privations of narrow fortune; for, while some submit in patience to their humble lot, with others, life is one long and hard-fought struggle, wherein health, hope, and temper are expended in vain. That the Daltons maintained a distance and reserve towards others of like fortune did, indeed, puzzle honest Hans—perhaps it displeased him, too—for he thought it might be pride; but then their treatment of himself disarmed that suspicion, for they not only received him ever cordially, but with every sign of real affection; and what was he to expect such? Nor were these the only traits that fascinated him; for all the rugged shell, the kernel was a heart as tender, as warm, and as full of generous emotions as ever beat within an ampler breast. The two sisters, in Hans's eyes, were alike beautiful; each had some grace or charm that he had never met with before, nor could he ever satisfy himself whether his fancy was more taken by Kate's wit, or by Ellen's gentleness.

If anything were needed to complete the measure of his admiration, their skill in carving those wooden figures, which he sold, would have been sufficient. These were in his eyes—nor was he a mean connoisseur—high efforts of genius; and Hans saw in them a poetry and a truthfulness to nature that such productions rarely, if ever, possess. To sell such things as mere toys, he regarded as little

short of a sacrilege, while even to part with them at all, cost him a pang like that the gold-worker of Florence experienced, when he saw some treasure of Benvenuto's chisel leave his possession. Not, indeed, that honest Hans had to struggle against that criminal passion which prompted the jeweller, even by deeds of assassination, to repossess himself of the coveted objects; nay, on the contrary, he felt a kindness and a degree of interest towards those in whose keeping they were, as if some secret sympathy united them to each other.

Is it any wonder if poor Hans forgot himself in such pleasant company, and sat a full hour and a half longer than he ought? To him the little intervals of silence that were occasionally suffered to intervene, were but moments of dreamy and delicious reverie, wherein his fancy wandered away in a thousand pleasant paths; and when at last the watchman—for remember, good reader, they were in that primitive Germany where customs change not too abruptly—announced two o'clock, little Hans did not vouchsafe a grateful response to the quaint old rhyme that was chanted beneath the window.

"That little chap would sit to the day of judgment, and never ask to wet his lips," said Dalton, as Frank accompanied the dwarf down stairs to the street door.

"I believe he not only forgot the hour, but where he was, and everything else," said Kate.

"And poor Frank! who should have been in bed some hours ago," sighed Nelly.

"Gone at last, girls!" exclaimed Frank, as he entered, laughing. "If it hadn't been a gust of wind that caught him at the door, and carried him clean away, our leave-taking might have lasted till morning. Poor fellow! he had so many cautions to give me—such mountains of good counsel; and see, here is a holy medal he made me accept. He told me the 'Swedes' would never harm me so long as I wore it. He still fancies that we are in the Thirty Years' War."

In a hearty laugh over Hans Roëckle's political knowledge, they wished each other an affectionate good night, and separated. Frank was to have his breakfast by daybreak, and each sister affected to leave the care of that

meal to the other, secretly resolving to be up and stirring first.

Save old Andy, there was not one disposed to sleep that night. All were too full of their own cares. Even Dalton himself, blunted as were his feelings by a long life of suffering, his mind was tortured by anxieties; and one sad question arose again and again before him, without an answer ever occurring. "What is to become of the girls when I am gone? Without a home, they will soon be without a protector!" The bright fancies, the hopeful visions in which the evening had been passed, made the revulsion to these gloomy thoughts the darker. He lay with his hands pressed upon his face, while the hot tears gushed from eyes that never before knew weeping.

At moments he half resolved not to let Frank depart, but an instant's thought showed him how futile would be the change. It would be but leaving him to share the poverty—to depend upon the scanty pittance already too little for themselves. "Would Count Stephen befriend the poor girls?" he asked himself over and over; and in his difficulty he turned to the strange epistle in which the old general announced Frank's appointment as a cadet.

The paper, the square folding, the straight, stiff letters, well suited a style which plainly proclaimed how many years his English had lain at rest. The note ran thus:—

"Graben-Wien, Octobre 9, 18—.

"Worthy Sir and Nephew,—Your kindly greeting, but long-time-on-the-road-coming letter is in my hands. It is to me pleasure that I announce the appointment of your son as a Cadet in the seventh battalion of the Carl-Franz Infanterie. So with, let him in all speed of time report himself here at Wien, before the War's Minister, bringing his Taufschein—Baptism's sign—as proof of Individualism.

"I am yours, well to command, and much-loving kinsman,

"Graf Dalton von Auersberg,
"Lieut.-General and Feldzeugmeister, K.K.A.

"To the high and well-born, the Freiherr v. Dalton,
in Baden-Baden."

CHAPTER III.

THE FOREST ROAD.

This dry epistle Dalton read and re-read, trying, if not to discover some touch of kindliness or interest, to detect, at least, some clue to its writer's nature; but to no use, its quaint formalism baffled all speculation, and he gave up the pursuit in despair. That "the Count" was his father's only brother, and a "Dalton," were the only grains of comfort he could extract from his meditations; but he had lived long enough in the world to know how little binding were the ties of kindred when once slackened by years and distance. The Count might, therefore, regard them in the light of intruders, and feel the very reverse of pleasure at the revival of a relationship which had slept for more than half a century. Dalton's pride—or what he thought his pride—revolted against this thought; for, although this same pride would not have withheld him from asking a favour of the Count, it would have assumed a most indignant attitude if refused, or even grudgingly accorded.

When the thought first occurred to him of applying to his uncle in Frank's behalf, he never hesitated about the propriety of addressing a request to one with whom he had never interchanged a line in all his life; and now he was quite ready to take offence, if all the warmth of blood relationship should not fill the heart of him who had been an exile from home and family since his earliest boyhood.

An easy, indolent selfishness had been the spirit of Dalton's whole life. He liked to keep a good house, and to see company about him; and this obtained for him the reputation of hospitality. He disliked unpopularity, and dreaded the "bad word" of the people; and hence he suffered his tenantry to fall into arrears and his estate into ruin. A vain rivalry with wealthier neighbours prevented retrenchment when his means were lessened. The

unthinking selfishness of his nature was apparent even in his marriage, since it was in obedience to an old pledge extracted years before that Miss Godfrey accepted him, and parted in anger with her brother, who had ever loved her with the warmest affection. Mr. Godfrey never forgave his sister; and at his death, the mysterious circumstances of which were never cleared up, his estate passed to a distant relative, the rich Sir Gilbert Stafford.

Dalton, who long cherished the hope of a reconciliation, saw all prospect vanish when his wife died, which she did, it was said, of a broken heart. His debts were already considerable, and all the resources of borrowing and mortgage had been long since exhausted; nothing was then left for him but an arrangement with his creditors, which, giving him a pittance scarcely above the very closest poverty, enabled him to drag out life in the cheap places of the Continent; and thus, for nigh twenty years, had he wandered about from Dieppe to Ostend, to Bruges, to Dusseldorf, to Coblentz, and so on, among the small Ducal cities, till, with still failing fortune, he was fain to seek a residence for the winter in Baden, where house-rent, at least, would be almost saved to him.

The same apathy that had brought on his ruin enabled him to bear it. Nothing has such a mock resemblance to wisdom as utter heartlessness; with all the seeming of true philosophy, it assumes a port and bearing above the trials of the world; holds on "the even tenor of its way," undeterred by the reverses which overwhelm others, and even meets the sternest frowns of fortune with the bland smile of equanimity.

In this way Dalton had deceived many who had known him in better days, and who now saw him, even in his adversity, with the same careless, good-natured look, as when he took the field with his own hounds, or passed round the claret at his own table. Even his own children were sharers in this delusion, and heard him with wondering admiration, as he told of the life he used to lead, and the style he once kept up at Mount Dalton. These were his favourite topics; and, as he grew older, he seemed to find a kind of consolation in contrasting all the hard rubs of present adversity with his once splendour.

Upon Ellen Dalton, who had known and could still remember her mother, these recitals produced an impression of profound grief, associated as they were with the sufferings of a sick-bed and the closing sorrows of a life; while, in the others, they served to keep up a species of pride of birth, and an assumption of superiority to others of like fortune, which their father gloried in, representing, as he used to say, "the old spirit of the Daltons."

As for Kate, she felt it a compensation for present poverty to know that they were of gentle blood, and that if fortune, at some distant future, would deal kindly by them, to think that they should not obtrude themselves like upstarts on the world, but resume, as it were, the place that was long their own.

In Frank the evil had taken a deeper root. Taught from his earliest infancy to believe himself the heir of an ancient house, pride of birth and station instilled into his mind by old Andy the huntsman, the only dependant, who, with characteristic wisdom, they had carried with them from Ireland, he never ceased to ponder on the subject, and wonder within himself if he should live to have "his own" again.

Such a hold had this passion taken of him, that, even as a child, he would wander away for days long into lonely and unfrequented spots, thinking over the stories he had heard, and trying to conjure up before his eyes some resemblance to that ancient house and venerable domain which had been so long in his family. It was no part of his teaching to know by what spendthrift and reckless waste, by what a long career of folly, extravagance, and dissipation, the fortune of his family had been wrecked; or rather, many vague and shadowy suspicions had been left to fester in his mind of wrongs and injuries done them; of severe laws imposed by English ignorance or cruelty; of injustice, on this hand—heartless indifference of friends on the other; the unrelenting anger of his uncle Godfrey filling up the measure of their calamities. Frank Dalton's education went very little further than this; but, bad as it was, its effect was blunted by the natural frankness and generosity of his character, its worst fruits being an over-estimate of himself and his

pretensions — errors which the world has always the watchful kindness to correct in those who wear threadbare coats and patched boots.

He was warmly and devotedly attached to his father and sisters, and whatever bitterness found its way into his heart was from seeing them enduring the many trials of poverty.

All his enthusiasm for the service in which he was about to enter was, therefore, barely sufficient to overcome the sorrow of parting with those, whom alone of all the world he loved; and when the moment drew nigh for his departure, he forgot the bright illusions by which he had so often fed his hopes, and could only think of the grief of separation.

His candle had burned down nearly to the socket, when he arose and looked at his watch. It was all dark as midnight without, although nigh six o'clock. He opened the window, and a thin snowdrift came slanting in, borne on a cutting north wind; he closed it hastily, and shuddered as he thought of the long and lonely march before him. All was silent in the house as he dressed himself and prepared for the road. With noiseless step he drew near his father's door and listened: everything was still. He could not bring himself to disturb him, so he passed on to the room where his sisters slept. The door lay ajar, and a candle was burning on the table. Frank entered on tiptoe and drew near the bed, but it was empty and had not been lain in. As he turned round he beheld Kate asleep in a chair, dressed as he had last seen her. She had never lain down, and the prayer-book, which had dropped from her hand, told how her last waking moments were passed.

He kissed her twice, but even the hot tears that fell from his eyes upon her cheek did not break her slumber. He looked about him for some token to leave, that might tell he had been there, but there was nothing, and, with a low sigh, he stole from the room.

As he passed out into the kitchen, Ellen was there. She had already prepared his breakfast, and was spreading the table when he entered.

"How good of you—how kind, Ellen," said he, as he passed his arm around her neck.

The Farewell Kiss

"Hush, Frank, they are both sleeping. Poor papa never closed his eyes till half an hour ago, and Kate was fairly overcome ere she yielded."

"You will say that I kissed them, Nelly—kissed them twice," said he in a low, broken voice, "and that I couldn't bear to awake them. Leave-taking is so sorrowful! Oh, Ellen, if I knew that you were all happy—that there were no hardships before you, when I'm away!"

"And why should we not, Frank?" said she, firmly. "There is no dishonour in this poverty, so long as there are no straits to make it seem other than it is. Let us rather pray for the spirit that may befit any lot we are thrown in, than for a fortune to which we might be unsuited."

"Would you forget who we are, Ellen?" said he, half reproachfully.

"I would remember it, Frank, in a temper less of pride than humility."

"I do not see much of the family spirit in all this," rejoined he, almost angrily.

"The family spirit," echoed she, feelingly. "What has it ever done for us, save injury? Has it suggested a high-bearing courage against the ills of narrow fortune? Has it told us how to bear poverty with dignity, or taught us one single lesson of patience and submission? Or has it, on the contrary, been ever present to whisper the changes in our condition—how altered our lot—making us ashamed of that companionship which our station rendered possible for us, and leaving us in the isolation of friendlessness for the sake of—I blush to abuse the word—our Pride! Oh, Frank, my dear, dear brother, take it not ill of me, that in our last moments together, perhaps for years, I speak what may jar upon your ears to hear; but remember that I am much older—that I have seen far more of the world, at least of its sorrows and cares, than you have. I have indeed known affliction in many ways, but have never found a poorer comforter in its troubles than what we call our Pride!"

"You would have me forget I am a Dalton, then?" said the boy, in a tone of sorrowful meaning.

"Never! when the recollection could prompt a generous

or a noble action, a manly ambition, or a high-hearted thought; but the name will have no spell in it, if used to instil an imperious, discontented spirit—a regretful contrast of what we are, with what we might have been, or what in a worldly sense is more destructive still, a false reliance on the distinction of a family to which we have contributed nothing."

"You do not know, Nelly dearest, of what a comfort you have robbed me," said Frank, sorrowfully.

"Do not say so, my dearest brother," cried she, passing her arm around him; "a deception, a mere illusion, is unworthy of that name. Look above the gratification of mere vanity, and you will become steeled against the many wounds self-love is sure to receive in intercourse with the world. I cannot tell how, or with what associates, you are about to live, but I feel certain that in every station a man of truth and honour will make himself respected. Be such, dearest Frank. If family pride—if the name of Dalton have value in your eyes, remember that upon you it rests to assert its right to distinction. If, as I would fondly hope, your heart dwells here with us, bethink ye what joy—what holy gratitude you will diffuse around our humble hearth—to know that our brother is a good man."

It was some moments ere either could speak again. Emotions, very different ones, perhaps, filled their hearts, and each was too deeply moved for words. Frank's eyes were full of tears, and his cheek quivering, as he threw his knapsack on his shoulder.

"You will write from Innspruck, Frank; but how many days will it take ere you reach that city?"

"Twelve or fourteen at least, if I go on foot. There, Nelly, do not help me, dearest; I shall not have you to-morrow to fasten these straps."

"This is not to be forgotten, Frank: it's Kate's present. How sorry she will be not to have given it with her own hands!" And so saying, she gave him the purse her sister had worked.

"But there is gold in it," said the boy, growing pale with emotion.

"Very little, Frank dearest," replied she, smiling. "A cadet must always have gold in his purse, so little

Hans tells us; and you know how wise he is in all these matters."

"And is it from a home like this that I am to take gold away!" cried he, passionately.

"Nay, Frank, you must not persuade us that we are so very poor. I will not consent to any sense of martyrdom, I promise you." It was not without difficulty she could overcome his scruples; nor, perhaps, had she succeeded at all, if his thoughts had not been diverted into another channel by a light tapping at the door. It was Hans Roëckle come to awake him.

Again and again the brother and sister embraced; and in a very agony of tears Frank tore himself away, and hastened down the stairs. The next moment the heavy house door banged loudly, and he was gone.

Oh, the loneliness of mind in which he threaded his way through the dark and narrow streets, where the snow already lay deeply! With what sinking of the heart he turned to look for the last time at the window where the light—the only one to be seen—still glimmered. How little could all the promptings of hope suffice against the sad and dark reality that he was leaving all he loved, and all who loved him, to adventure upon a world where all was bleak and friendless!

But not all his dark forebodings could equal hers from whom he had just parted. Loving her brother with an affection more like that of mother than sister, she had often thought over the traits of his character, where, with many a noble gift, the evil seeds of wrong teaching had left, like tall weeds among flowers, the baneful errors of inordinate self-esteem and pride. Ignorant of the career on which he was about to enter, Ellen could but speculate vaguely how such a character would be esteemed, and whether his native frankness and generosity would cover over, or make appear as foibles, these graver faults. Their own narrow fortunes, the very straits and privations of poverty, with all their cruel wounds to honest pride, and all their sore trials of temper, she could bear up against with an undaunted courage. She had learned her lesson in the only school wherein it is taught, and daily habit had instilled its own powers of endurance; but, for Frank,

her ambition hoped a higher and brighter destiny, and now, in her solitude, and with a swelling heart, she knelt down and prayed for him. And, oh! if the utterings of such devotion never rise to Heaven or meet acceptance there, they at least bring balm to the spirit of him who syllables them, building up a hope whose foundations are above the casualties of humanity, and giving a courage that mere self-reliance never gave.

Little Hans not only came to awaken Frank, but to give him companionship for some miles of his way—a thoughtful kindness, for which the youth's deep preoccupation seemed to offer but a poor return. Indeed, Frank scarcely knew that he was not travelling in utter solitude, and all the skilful devices of the worthy dwarf to turn the channel of his thoughts were fruitless. Had there been sufficient light to have surveyed the equipment of his companion, it is more than probable that the sight would have done more to produce this diversion of gloom than any arguments which could have been used. Master Roëckle, whose mind was a perfect storehouse of German horrors, earthly and unearthly, and who imagined that a great majority of the human population of the globe were either bandits or witches, had surrounded himself with a whole museum of amulets and charms of various kinds. In his cap he wore the tail of a black squirrel, as a safeguard against the "Forest Imp;" a large dried toad hung around his neck, like an order, to protect him from the evil eye; a duck's foot was fastened to the tassel of his boot, as a talisman against drowning; while strings of medals, coins, precious stones, blessed beads, and dried insects, hung round and about him in every direction. Of all the portions of his equipment, however, what seemed the most absurd was a huge pole-axe of the fifteenth century, and which he carried as a defence against mere mortal foes, but which, from its weight and size, appeared far more likely to lay its bearer low than inflict injury upon others. It had been originally stored up in the Rust Kammer, at Prague, and was said to be the identical weapon with which Conrad slew the giant at Leutmeritz—a fact which warranted Hans in expending two hundred florins in purchasing it; as, to use his own

emphatic words, "it was not every day one knew where to find the weapon to bring down a giant."

As Hans, encumbered by his various adjuncts, trotted along beside his stalwart companion, he soon discovered that all his conversational ability—to exert which cost him so dearly—was utterly unattended to; he fell into a moody silence, and thus they journeyed for miles of way without interchanging a word. At last they came in sight of the little village of Hernitz Kretschen, whence by a by-road Frank was to reach the regular line that leads through the Höhlen Thal to the Lake of Constance, and where they were to part.

"I feel as though I could almost go all the way with you," said Hans, as they stopped to gaze upon the little valley where lay the village, and beyond which stretched a deep forest of dark pine-trees, traversed by a single road.

"Nay, Hans," said Frank, smiling, as for the first time he beheld the stange figure beside him; "you must go back to your pleasant little village and live happily, to do many a kindness to others, as you have done to me to-day."

"I would like to take service with the Empress myself," said Hans, "if it were for some good and great cause, like the defence of the Church against the Turks, or the extermination of the race of dragons that infest the Lower Danube."

"But you forget, Hans, it is an Emperor rules over Austria now," said Frank, preferring to offer a correction to the less startling of his hallucinations.

"No, no, Master Frank, they have not deposed the good Maria Teresa—they would never do that. I saw her picture over the doorway of the Burgermeister the last time I went to visit my mother in the Bregertzer Wald, and by the same token her crown and sceptre were just newly gilt—a thing they would not have done if she were not on the throne."

"What if she were dead, and her son too?" said Frank; but his words were scarce uttered when he regretted to have said them, so striking was the change that came over the dwarf's features.

"If that were indeed true, Heaven have mercy on us!" exclaimed he, piously. "Old Frederick will have but little pity for good Catholics! But no, Master Frank, this cannot be. The last time I received soldiers from Neuremberg they wore the same uniforms as ever, and the 'Moriamur pro Rege nostro, M. T.' was in gold letters on every banner as before."

Frank was in no humour to disturb so innocent and so pleasing a delusion, and he gave no further opposition, and now they both descended the path which led to the little inn of the village. Here Hans insisted on performing the part of host, and soon the table was covered with brown bread and hard eggs, and those great massive sausages which Germans love, together with various flasks of Margräfler and other "Badisch" wines.

"Who knows," said Hans, as he pledged his guest by ringing his wine-glass against the other's, if, when we meet again, thou wouldst sit down at the table with such as me."

"How so, Hanserl?" asked the boy, in astonishment.

"I mean, Master Franz, that you may become a colonel, or perhaps a general, with mayhap the 'St. Joseph' at your button-hole, or the 'Maria Teresa' around your neck; and if so, how could you take your place at the board with the poor toy-maker?"

"I am not ashamed to do so now," said Frank, haughtily; "and the Emperor cannot make me more a gentleman than my birth has done. Were I to be ashamed of those who befriended me, I should both disgrace my rank and name together."

"These are good words, albeit too proud ones," said Hans, thoughtfully. "As a guide through life, pride will do well enough when the roads are good and your equipage costly; but when you come upon mountain-paths and stony tracts, with many a wild torrent to cross, and many a dark glen to traverse, humility—even a child's humility—will give better teaching."

"I have no right to be other than humble!" said the boy; but the flashing brightness of his eyes, and the heightened colour of his cheek, seemed to contradict his words.

For a while the conversation flagged, or was maintained in short and broken sentences, when at length Frank said,—

"You will often go to see them, Hanserl, won't you? You'll sit with them, too, of an evening? for they will feel lonely now; and my father will like to tell you his stories about home, as he calls it still."

"That will I," said Hans; "they are the happiest hours of my life when I sit beside that hearth."

Frank drew his hand across his eyes, and his lips quivered as he tried to speak,

"You'll be kind to poor Ellen, too; she is so timid, Hans. You cannot believe how anxious she is, lest her little carvings should be thought unworthy of praise."

"They are gems! they are treasures of art!" cried Hans, enthusiastically.

"And my sweet Kate!" cried the boy, as his eyes ran over, while a throng of emotions seemed to stop his utterance.

"She is so beautiful!" exclaimed Hans, fervently. "Except the Blessed Maria at the Holy Cross, I never beheld such loveliness. There is the Angelus ringing; let us pray a blessing on them;" and they both knelt down in deep devotion. Frank's lips never moved, but with swelling heart and clasped hands he remained fixed as a statue; while Hanserl in some quaint old rhyme uttered his devotions.

"And yonder is the dog-star, bright and splendid," said Hans, as he arose. "There never was a happier omen for the beginning of a journey. You'll be lucky, boy; there is the earnest of good fortune. That same star was shining along the path as I entered Baden, eighteen years ago; and see what a lucky life has mine been!"

Frank could not but smile at the poor dwarf's appreciation of his fortune; but Hanserl's features wore a look that betokened a happy and contented nature.

"And yours has been a lucky life, Hanserl?" said he, half in question.

"Lucky? ay, that has it. I was a poor boy, barefooted and hungry in my native forest—deformed, and stunted, too—a thing to pity—too weak to work, and with none to

teach me, and yet even I was not forgotten by Him who made the world so fair and beautiful; but in my heart was planted a desire to be something—to do something, that others might benefit by. The children used to mock me as I passed along the road; but a voice whispered within me, 'Be of courage, Hanserl, they will bless thee yet—they will greet thee with many a merry laugh and joyous cry, and call thee their own kind Hanserl:' and so have I lived to see it! My name is far and wide over Germany. Little boys and girls know and speak of me amongst the first words they syllable; and from the palace to the bauer's hut, Hans Roëckle has his friends; and who knows, that when this poor clay is mingled with the earth, but that my spirit will hover around the Christmas-tree when glad voices call upon me! I often think it will be so."

Frank's eyes glistened as he gazed upon the dwarf, who spoke with a degree of emotion and feeling very different from his wont.

"So you see, Master Franz," said he, smiling, "there are ambitions of every hue, and this of mine you may deem of the very faintest, but it is enough for me. Had I been a great painter, or a poet, I would have revelled in the thought that my genius adorned the walls of many a noble palace, and that my verses kindled emotions in many a heart that felt like my own; but as one whom nature has not gifted—poor, ignoble, and unlettered—am I not lucky to have found a little world of joyous hearts and merry voices, who care for me and speak of me? Ay, and who would give me a higher place in their esteem than to Jean Paul, or Goethe himself."

The friends had but time to pledge each other in a parting glass, when the stage drove up by which Hans was to return to Baden. A few hurried words, half-cheering, half-sorrowful—a close embrace—one long and lingering squeeze of the hand—

"Farewell, kind Hanserl"—

"God guide thee, Franz"—and they parted.

Frank stood in the little "Platz," where the crowd yet lingered, watching the retiring "Post," uncertain which way to turn him. He dreaded to find himself all alone,

and yet he shrank from new companionship. The newly-risen moon, and the calm air, invited him to pursue his road; so he set out once more, the very exercise being a relief against his sad thoughts.

Few words are more easily spoken than "He went to seek his fortune;" and what a whole world lies within the narrow compass. A world of high-hearted hopes and doubting fear—of noble ambition to be won, and glorious paths to be trod, mingled with tender thoughts of home and those who made it such. What sustaining courage must be his who dares this course and braves that terrible conflict—the toughest that ever man fought—between his own bright colouring of life and the stern reality of the world. How many hopes has he to abandon—how many illusions to give up. How often is his faith to be falsified and his trustfulness betrayed; and, worst of all, what a fatal change do these trials impress upon himself—how different is he from what he had been.

Young and untried as Frank Dalton was in life, he was not altogether unprepared for the vicissitudes that awaited him; his sister Nelly's teachings had done much to temper the over-buoyant spirit of his nature, and make him feel that he must draw upon that same courage to sustain the present, rather than to gild the future.

His heart was sorrowful, too, at leaving a home where unitedly they had, perhaps, borne up better against poverty. He felt—for his own heart revealed it—how much can be endured in companionship, and how the burden of misfortune—like every other load—is light when many bear it. Now thinking of these things, now fancying the kind of life that might lie before him, he marched along. Then he wondered whether the count would resemble his father. The Daltons were remarkable for strong traits of family likeness, not alone in feature, but in character—and what a comfort Frank felt in fancying that the old general would be a thorough Dalton in frankness and kindliness of nature, easy in disposition, with all the careless freedom of his own father! How he should love him, as one of themselves.

It is a well-known fact, that certain families are remarkable above others for the importance that they attach

to the ties of kindred, making the boast of relationship always superior to the claims of self-formed friendships. This is perhaps more peculiarly the case among those who live little in the world, and whose daily sayings and doings are chiefly confined to the narrow circle of home. But yet it is singular how long this prejudice—for perhaps it deserves no better name—can stand the conflict of actual life. The Daltons were a special instance of what we mean. Certain characteristics of look and feature distinguished them all, and they all agreed in maintaining the claim of relationship as the strongest bond of union; and it was strange into how many minor channels this stream meandered. Every old ruin, every monument, every fragment of armour, or ancient volume associated with their name, assumed a kind of religious value in their eyes, and the word Dalton was a talisman to exalt the veriest trifle into the rank of relic. From his earliest infancy Frank had been taught these lessons. They were the traditions of the parlour and the kitchen, and by the mere force of repetition became a part of his very nature. Corrig-O'Neal was the theme of every story. The ancient house of the family, and which, although by time's changes it had fallen into the hands of the Godfreys—from whom his mother came—was yet regarded with all the feelings of ancient pride. Over and over again was he told of the once princely state that his ancestors held there—the troops of retainers—the mounted followers that ever accompanied them. The old house itself was exalted to the rank of a palace, and its wide-spreading but neglected grounds spoken of like the park of royalty.

To see this old house of his fathers, to behold with his own eyes the seat of their once greatness, became the passion of the boy's heart. Never did the Bedouin of the Desert long after Mecca with more heart-straining desire. To such a pitch had this passion gained on him, that, unable any longer to resist an impulse that neither left his thoughts by day nor his dreams by night, he fled from his school at Bruges, and when only ten years old made his way to Ostend, and under pretence of seeking a return to his family, persuaded the skipper of a trading vessel to give him a passage to Limerick. It would take us too far

from our road—already a long one—were we to follow his wanderings and tell of all the difficulties that beset the little fellow on his lonely journey. Enough that we say, he did at last reach the goal of his hopes; and, after a journey of eight long days, find himself at the ancient gate of Corrig-O'Neal.

At first the disappointment was dreadful. The proud mansion, of whose glorious splendour his imagination had created an Oriental palace, was an antiquated brick edifice, in front of which ran a long terrace, once adorned with statues, but of which the pedestals alone remained. A few hedges of yew, with here and there the fragments of a marble figure or fountain, showed that the old French château taste had once prevailed there; and of this a quaint straight avenue of lime-trees, reaching directly from the door to the river, also bore evidence. The tone of sadness and desertion was on everything; many of the lower windows were walled up; the great door itself was fastened and barricaded in such a way as to show it had been long disused. Not a creature was to be seen stirring about the place, and save that at night the flickering light of a candle might be descried from a small casement that looked upon the garden, the house might have been deemed uninhabited. Perhaps something in the mysterious desolation of the scene had its influence over the boy's mind; but as hour by hour he lingered in those silent woods, and lay in the deep grass, watching the cloud shadows as they stole along, he grew fondly attached to the place; now losing himself in some reverie of the long past, now following out some half-remembered narrative of his mother's childhood, when she herself dwelt there.

All his little resources of pocket-money expended,—his clothes, save such as he wore, sold,—he could scarcely tear himself from a scene that filled every avenue of his heart. The time, however, came, when a ship, about to sail for the Scheldt, gave him the opportunity of returning home; and now this was to be his last day at Corrig-O'Neal.

And what a day of conflicting thought was it!—now half resolved to approach the house, and ask to see his

uncle, and now repelled by remembering all his unkindness to his father. Then marvelling whether some change might not have taken place in the old man's mind, and whether in his lonely desolation he might not wish once more to see his kindred near him.

He knew not what to do, and evening found him still undecided, and sitting on a little rising spot, from which the view extended over the garden at the back of the house, and whence he had often watched the solitary light that marked the old man's vigils.

Wearied by long watching and thought, he fell asleep; and when he awoke, the light was gone—the light which hitherto had always burned till daybreak! and from the darkness it must now be far from that hour. While Frank wondered what this might mean, he was startled by hearing footsteps near him—at least so they sounded—on the gravel-walk of the garden, and in a few minutes after the grating sound of a key, and the opening of a small door which led out into the wood. He now perceived that a man was standing at the foot of the knoll, who seemed irresolute and undecided; for he twice returned to the door, once introduced the key, and again withdrew it, as if with a changed purpose. Suddenly he appeared to have made up his mind, for, stooping down, he began to dig with the greatest energy, stopping at intervals to listen, and again continuing his work when satisfied that he was unobserved.

The hour—the scene itself—the evident secrecy of the man, almost paralyzed the boy with terror; nor was it till long after the turf was replaced, dry leaves and dead branches were strewn over the spot, and the man himself gone, that Frank gained courage to move away. This he did at first cautiously and timidly, and then with a speed that soon carried him far away from the spot. The following day he was at sea; and if at first the strange scene never left his thoughts, with time the impression faded away, till at length it assumed the indistinctness of a vision, or of some picture created by mere imagination.

When he did return home, he never revealed, except to Nelly, where he had been, and the object for which he

went; but, even to her, from some strange love of mystery, he told nothing of the last night's experience: this was a secret, which he hoarded like a miser's treasure, and loved to think that he only knew of. The stirring events of a schoolboy's life, at first, and subsequently the changeful scenes of opening manhood, gradually effaced the impression of what he had seen, or merely left it to all the indistinctness of a dream.

And thus are thoughts often sealed up in the memory for years—unnoticed and unknown—till, after a long interval, they are all called forth, and become the very pivots on which turns our destiny.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ONSLOWS.

The little town of Baden was thrown into a state of considerable excitement by the unexpected arrival we have chronicled in a preceding chapter, and the host of "The Russie" reduced to the most uncommon straits to restore the effective of a staff, now brought down to the closest economy of retrenchment. Cooks, waiters, and housemaids were sought after in every quarter, while emissaries were despatched right and left to replenish the larder and provide for the wants of the mighty "Englander." Nor was all the bustle and commotion limited to within the hotel, but extended throughout the village itself, where many a rustic pony, laid up in ordinary for the winter, was again trimmed, and curried, and shod, to be paraded before the windows with a scarlet saddle-cloth and a worsted tassel to the bridle, in all the seductive attraction of a palfrey. Even flower-girls made their

appearance again with a few frost-nipped buds and leaves; while a bassoon and a triangle, voting themselves a band, gave horrid signs of their means of persecution.

Meanwhile were the fortunate individuals, for whose benefit these exertions were evoked, in the most blissful ignorance of all the interest they were awakening. From the first moment of their arrival none had even seen them. Waited upon by their own servants, scarcely heard, not even appearing at the windows, they were unconsciously ministering to a mystery that now engaged every tongue and ear around them. As, however, nothing of secrecy had any share in their proceedings, we have no scruple in invading the presence and introducing the reader to the company.

Sir Stafford Onslow was an immensely rich London banker, who in his capacity of borough member had voted steadily with the Whigs for some five-and-twenty years; supporting them by all the influence of his wealth and family, and who now came abroad, in a pet of sulk with his party, on being refused the peerage. By nature generous, kind-hearted, and affectionate, the constant pressure of a more ambitious wife had involved him in a career to which neither his tastes nor habits suited him. The fortune which he would have dispensed with dignity and munificence he was eternally taught to believe should be the stepping-stone to something higher in rank. All his influence in the City, of which he was justly proud, he was told was a mere vulgar ambition in comparison with that a coronet would bestow on him; and, in fact, having believed himself the leading man of a great section in society, he was led to look upon his position with discontent, and fancy that his just claims were disregarded and denied. Lady Hester Onslow, who having once been a beauty and the admired belle of royalty itself, had accepted the banker in a moment of pique, and never forgave him afterwards the unhappy preference.

Belonging to a very ancient but poor family, few were surprised at her accepting a husband some thirty-odd years her senior; and it is probable that she would fully have recognized the prudence of her choice if, by the

death of a distant relative in India, which occurred a few months after her marriage, she had not acquired a very large fortune. This sudden accession of wealth coming, as she herself said, "too late," embittered every hour of her after-life.

Had she been but wealthy a few months back, she had married the man she loved, or whom she thought she loved—the heartless, handsome, well-mannered Lord Norwood, a penniless viscount, ruined before he came of age, and with no other means of support than the faculties which knavery had sharpened into talent.

Miss Onslow and her brother, both the children of a former marriage, were strikingly like their father, not alone in feature, but in the traits of his frank and generous character. They were devotedly attached to him, not the less, perhaps, from the circumstances of a marriage to which they were strongly opposed, and whose results they now saw in many a passage of discord and disagreement.

George and Sydney Onslow were both dark-complexioned and black-eyed, and had many traits of Spanish origin in appearance, their mother having been from that country. Lady Hester was a blonde, and affected to think that the Southern tint was but an approximation to the negro. Nor was she less critical on their manners, whose joyous freedom she pronounced essentially vulgar. Such, in a few words, were the discordant elements which Fate had bound up as a family, and who now, by the sudden illness of Sir Stafford, were driven to seek refuge in the deserted town of Baden. Nor can we omit another who, although not tied to the rest by kindred, had been long a member of the circle. This was Dr. Grounsell, an old college friend of Sir Stafford's, and who, having lost every shilling of his fortune by a speculation, had taken up his home at the banker's many years previous to his second marriage. Lady Hester's dislike to him amounted to actual hatred. She detested him for the influence he possessed over her husband—for the sturdiness of a character that resisted every blandishment—for a quaintness that certainly verged upon vulgarity, and, most of all, for the open and undisguised manner he always

declared against every scheme for the attainment of a title.

As Sir Stafford's physician, the only one in whom he had confidence, the doctor was enabled to stand his ground against attacks which must have conquered him; and by dint of long resistance and a certain obstinacy of character, he had grown to take pleasure in an opposition which, to a man of more refinement and feeling, must have proved intolerable; and although decidedly attached to Sir Stafford and his children, it is probable that he was still more bound to them by hate to "my lady," than by all his affection for themselves.

Grounsell detested the Continent, yet he followed them abroad, resolved never to give up an inch of ground uncontested; and although assailed by a thousand slights and petty insults, he stood stoutly up against them all, defying every effort of fine ladyism, French cookery, homœopathy, puppyism, and the water-cure, to dislodge him from his position. There was very possibly more of dogged malice in all this than amiability or attachment to his friends, but it is due to the doctor to say that he was no hypocrite, and would never have blinked the acknowledgment if fairly confronted with the charge.

Although, if it had not been for my lady's resentful notice of the ministerial neglect, the whole family would have been snugly domesticated in their beautiful villa beside the Thames at Richmond, she artfully contrived to throw the whole weight of every annoyance they experienced upon every one's shoulders rather than her own; and as she certainly called to her aid no remarkable philosophy against the inconveniences of travel, the budget of her grievances assumed a most imposing bulk.

Dressed in the very perfection of a morning costume, her cap, her gloves, her embroidered slippers, all in the most accurate keeping with that assumed air of seclusion by which fine ladies compliment the visitor fortunate enough to be admitted to their presence, Lady Hester sat at a window, occasionally looking from the deep lace that bordered her handkerchief to the picturesque scene of mountain and river that lay before her. A fastidious taste might have found something to be pleased

with in either, but assuredly her handsome features evinced no agreeable emotion, and her expression was that of utter ennui and listlessness.

At another window sat Sydney Onslow drawing; her brother standing behind her chair, and from time to time adding his counsels, but in a tone studiously low and whispered. "Get that shadow in something deeper, Syd, and you'll have more effect in the distance."

"What is that I hear about effect and distance?" sighed out my lady. "You surely are not drawing?"

"Only sketching; making a hurried note of that wheel, and the quaint old-fashioned house beside it," said Sydney, diffidently.

"What a refinement of cruelty! The detestable noise of that mill kept me awake all night, and you mean to perpetuate the remembrance by a picture. Pray, be a good child and throw it out of the window."

Sydney looked up in her brother's face, where already a crimson flush of anger was gathering, but before she could reply he spoke for her. "The drawing is for me, Lady Onslow. You'll excuse me if I do not consent to the fate you propose for it."

"Let me look at it," said she, languidly; and the young girl arose and presented the drawing to her. "How droll!" said she, laughing; "I suppose it is peculiar to Germany that water can run up hill."

"The shadow will correct that," said Sydney, smiling; "and when the foreground is darker——" A violent slam of the door cut short the explanation. It was George Onslow, who, too indignant at the practised impertinence toward his sister, dashed out of the room in a passion.

"How underbred your brother will persist in being, my love," said she, calmly; "that vile trick of slamming a door, they learn, I'm told, in the Guards' Club. I'm sure I always thought it was confined to the melodrames one sees at the Porte St. Martin."

At this moment a servant appeared at the door. "Colonel Haggerstone's compliments, my lady, and begs to know how Sir Stafford is to-day."

"Something better," replied she, curtly; and as the

man disappeared, she added, "Whose compliments did he say?"

"I did not hear the name—it sounded like Haggerstone."

"Impossible, child; we know of no such person. What hour is it?"

"A few minutes past two."

"Oh dear! I fancied it had been four—or five—or six," sighed she, drearily. "The amiable doctor has not made his report to-day of your papa, and he went to see him immediately after breakfast."

"He told George that there was no amendment," said Sydney, gravely.

"He told George! Then he did not deign to tell me."

"You were not here at the moment. It was as he passed through the room hurriedly."

"I conclude that I was in my dressing-room. But it is only in keeping with Mr. Grounsell's studied disrespect—a line of conduct I grieve to see him supported in by members of this family."

"Mr. Alfred Jekyl, my lady," said a servant, "with inquiry for Sir Stafford."

"*You* appear to know best, my dear, how your papa is. Pray answer that inquiry."

"Sir Stafford is not better," said Sydney to the servant.

"Who can all these people be, my dear?" said Lady Hester, with more animation of manner than she had yet exhibited. "Jekyl is a name one knows. There are Northamptonshire Jekyls, and. if I mistake not, it was a Jekyl married Lady Olivia Drossmore, was it not? Oh, what a fool I am to ask *you*, who never know anything of family or connection! And yet I'm certain I've told you over and over the importance—the actual necessity—of this knowledge. If you only bestowed upon Burke a tithe of the patience and time I have seen you devote to Lyell, you'd not commit the shocking mistake you fell into t'other day of discussing the Duchess of Dartley's character with Lord Brandford, from whom she was divorced. Now you'd never offend quartz and sandstone by miscalling *their* affinities. But here comes the doctor."

If Doctor Grounsell had been intended by nature to

outrage all ultra-refined notions regarding personal appearance, he could not possibly have been more cunningly fashioned. Somewhat below the middle size, and squarely formed, his legs did not occupy more than a third of his height; his head was preternaturally large, and seemed even larger from a crop of curly yellowish hair, whose flaring ochre only rescued it from the imputation of being a wig. His hands and feet were enormous, requiring a muscular effort to move them that made all his gestures grotesque and uncouth. In addition to these native graces, his clothes were always made much too large for him, from his avowed dislike to the over-tightening and squeezing of modern fashion.

As his whole life had been passed in the superintendence of a great military hospital in the East, wherein all his conversations with his brethren were maintained in technicalities, he had never converted the professional jargon into a popular currency, but used the terms of art upon all occasions, regardless of the inability of the unmedical world to understand him.

"Well, sir, what is your report to-day?" said Lady Onslow, assuming her very stateliest of manners.

"Better, and worse, madam. The arthritis relieved, the cardiac symptoms more imminent."

"Please to bear in mind, sir, that I have not studied at Apothecaries' Hall."

"Nor I, madam, but at Edinburgh and Aberdeen, in the faculties of medicine and surgery," said Grounsell, drawing down his waistcoat, and arranging himself in what he considered an order of battle.

"Is papa better, doctor?" said Sydney, mildly.

"The articular affection is certainly alleviated, but there is mischief here," said Grounsell, placing his hand over his heart; "fibrous tissues, my dear Miss Onslow—fibrous tissues are ticklish affairs."

"Is this advice to be construed in a moral rather than a medical sense?" said Lady Onslow, with a malicious smile.

"Either, or both," replied the doctor. "The heart will always be highly susceptible of nervous influence."

"But papa——" broke in Sydney, eagerly.

"Is suffering under metastasis—migratory gout, it may be termed—changing from articular to large organic structures."

"And, of course, you are giving him the old poisons that were in use fifty years ago?"

"What do you mean, madam?" said Grounsell, sternly.

"That shocking thing that drives people mad—colocynth, or colchicum, or something like that. You know what I mean?"

"Happily for me, madam, I can guess it."

"And are you still as obstinate as ever about the globules?"

"The homœopathic humbug?"

"If you are polite enough so to designate what I put the most implicit trust in. But I warn you, sir, I mean to exert my just and rightful influence with Sir Stafford; and in case a very great change does not appear to-morrow, I shall insist upon his trying the aconite."

"If you do, madam, the insurance offices shall hear of it!" said Grounsell, with a sternness that made the threat most significant.

"I'll send for that man from Heidelberg at once, Sydney," said Lady Hester, as, pale with passion, she seated herself at her writing-table.

"Take care what you do, madam," said Grounsell, approaching where she sat, and speaking in a low and solemn voice. "Let not any feeling of displeasure with me induce you to an act of rashness—or imprudence. My old friend's state is critical; it may at any moment become dangerous. I am convinced that what I am doing offers the most reasonable hope of serving him. Take care lest you weaken his confidence in me, when he may not be prepared to repose it in another."

"Here, Sydney, you write German; and it is possible he may not read French. This is his name—I got it in Paris—Graëffnell. Tell him to come at once—in fact, let François take a carriage for him."

Sydney Onslow looked at her mother and then at the doctor. At the latter her glance was almost imploring, but he never noticed it, turning abruptly toward the window without uttering a word.

"Can you consult with him, doctor?" asked Sydney, timidly.

"Of course not; he's a mountebank."

"Write, as I bade you, Miss Onslow," said Lady Hester. "Dr. Graëffnell is one of the first men in Germany. Lady Heskisson sent for him when the earl fell ill at Wiesbaden.

"And the countess was a widow in four days after. Don't forget the *dénouement* of the story, madam."

Sydney dropped the pen, and her hands fell powerless to her side. There was something in the sternness of the doctor that seemed to awe even Lady Onslow, for she made no reply; while Grounsell, seeing his advantage, left the room at once, without further parley.

Our readers will probably forgive us if we follow his example, and not remain to listen to the eloquent monologue in which Lady Onslow lamented her sad condition in life. Not only did she bewail her destiny, but, like one of those classic personages the Greek Chorus presents us to, she proceeded to speculate upon every possible mischance futurity might have in store for her, ingeniously inventing "situations," and devising "predicaments" that nothing less gifted than a self-tormenting imagination can conceive. Leaving her to all the pleasure such a pastime can give, we shall quit the house, and, although a cold, raw evening is closing in, wander out into the street.

CHAPTER V.

THE PATIENT.

Along the dark and narrow street, over which the coming night cast a dreary shadow, a single lamp was seen to shine at the door of Ludwig Kraus, the apothecary; a beacon, it is but fair to add, lighted less with the hope of attracting custom, than in obedience to the requirements of the law, for Herr Kraus was a "state" official, and bound to conform to the dictates of the government. His shop was a small triangular space, in which there was barely room for the learned dispenser and a single client at the same moment, thus giving to all his interviews the secrecy of the confessional itself. Jars, phials, flasks, and drawers rose on every side, not inscribed with the vulgar nomenclature of modern physic, but bearing the enigmatical marks and hieroglyphics known to Galen and Paracelsus. Arabic letters, dragons, strange monsters, and zodiacal signs met the eye everywhere, and did not consort ill with the spare form and high bald head of the proprietor, whose quaint-figured dressing-gown and black velvet cap gave him a kind of resemblance to an alchemist in his workshop. As Grounsell approached the glass door and peeped in, the scene that presented itself rather assisted this illusion, for straight in front of the little counter over which Kraus was leaning, sat the dwarf, Hans Roëckle, talking away with considerable animation, and from time to time seeming to expatiate upon the merits of a wooden figure which he held carefully in his hands. The small, half-lighted chamber, the passive, motionless features of the chemist, the strange wild gestures of little Hans, as, in his tongue of mysterious gutturals, he poured out a flood of words, amazed Grounsell, and excited his curiosity to the utmost. He continued to gaze in for a considerable time, without being able to guess what it might mean, and

at last abandoning all conjecture he resolved to enter. Scarcely had he touched the handle of the door, however, than the dwarf, seizing the figure, concealed it beneath the skirt of his fur mantle, and retired to a corner of the shop. Dr. Grounsell's errand was to obtain certain medicines for his patient, which, from his ignorance of German, he had taken the precaution to write down in Latin. He passed the paper in silence over the counter, and waited patiently as the chemist spelt out the words. Having read it through, he handed back the paper with a few dry words, which, being in his native tongue, were totally incomprehensible.

"You must have these things, surely," exclaimed Grounsell; "they are the commonest of all medicines;" and then remembering himself, he made signs in the direction of the drawers and phials to express his meaning. Again the chemist uttered some dozen words.

The doctor produced his purse, where certain gold pieces glittered, as though to imply that he was willing to pay handsomely for his ignorance; but the other pushed it away, and shook his head in resolute refusal.

"This is too bad," muttered Grounsell, angrily. "I'll be sworn he has the things, and will not give them." The chemist motioned Hans to approach, and whispered a few words in his hearing, on which the dwarf, removing his cap in courteous salutation, addressed Grounsell: "High-born and much-learned Saar. De laws make no oder that doctoren have recht to write physics."

"What!" cried Grounsell, not understanding the meaning of this speech. Hans repeated it, more slowly, and at length succeeded in conveying the fact that physicians alone were qualified to procure medicines.

"But I am a doctor, my worthy friend, a physician of long standing."

"Das ist possible—who knows?"

"I know, and I say it," rejoined the other, tersely.

"Ja! ja!" responded Hans, as though to say the theme were not worth being warm about, one way or t'other.

"Come, my dear sir," said Grounsell, coaxingly; "pray be good enough to explain that I want these medicines for a sick friend, who is now at the hotel here, dangerously ill of gout."

"Podagra—gout!" exclaimed Hans, with sudden animation, "and dese are de cure for gout?"

"They will, I hope, be of service against it."

"You shall have dem—Saar—on one condition. That ist, you will visit anoder sick man mit gout—an Englessman, too—verh ill—verh sick;—and no rich—you understan."

"Yes, yes; I understand perfectly. I'll see him with pleasure. Tell this worthy man to make up these for me, and I'll go along with you now."

"Gut! verh good," said Hans, as in a few words of German he expressed to the apothecary that he might venture to transgress the law in the present case when the season was over, and no one to be the wiser.

As Hans issued forth to show the way, he never ceased to insist upon the fact that the present was not a case for a fee, and that the doctor should well understand the condition upon which his visit was to be paid; and still inveighing on this theme, he arrived at the house where the Daltons dwelt. "Remember, too," said Hans, "that, though they are poor, they are of guten stamm—how say you, noble?" Grounsell listened with due attention to all Hanserl's cautions, following, not without difficulty, his strange and guttural utterances.

"I will go before. Stay here," said Hans, as they gained the landing-place; and so saying, he pushed open the door and disappeared.

As Grounsell stood alone and in the dark, he wondered within himself what strange chances should have brought a fellow-countryman into this companionship, for there was something so grotesque in Hans's appearance and manner, that it routed all notion of his being admitted to any footing of friendly equality.

The door at length opened, and the doctor followed Hans into a dimly-lighted room, where Dalton lay, half dressed, upon his bed. Before Grounsell had well passed the entrance, the sick man said, "I am afraid, sir, that my little friend here has taken a bit of liberty with both of us, since I believe you wanted a patient just as little as I did a doctor."

The anxious, lustrous eye, the flushed cheek, and tremu-

lous lip of the speaker gave, at the same time, a striking contradiction to his words. Grounsell's practised glance read these signs rapidly, and drawing near the bed, he seated himself beside it, saying, "It is quite clear, sir, that you are not well, and although, if we were both of us in our own country, this visit of mine would, as you observe, be a considerable liberty, seeing that we are in a foreign land, I hope you will not deem my intrusion of this nature, but suffer me, if I can, to be of some service to you."

Less the words themselves than a certain purpose-like kindliness in the speaker's manner, induced Dalton to accept the offer, and reply to the questions which the other proposed to him. "No, no, doctor," said he, after a few moments; "there is no great mischief brewing after all. The truth is, I was fretted—harassed a little. It was about a boy of mine—I have only one—and he's gone away to be a soldier with the Austrians. You know, of course —as who doesn't?—how hard it is to do anything for a young man now-a-days. If family or high connection could do it, we'd be as well off as our neighbours. We belong to the Daltons of Garrigmore, that you know are full blood with the O'Neals of Cappagh. But what's the use of blood now?—devil a good it does a man. It would be better to have your father a cotton-spinner, or an iron-master, than the descendant of Shane Mohr na Manna."

"I believe you are right," observed the doctor, dryly.

"I know I am; I feel it myself, and I'm almost ashamed to tell it. Here am I, Peter Dalton, the last of them now; and may I never leave this bed, if I could make a barony constable in the county where the king's writ couldn't run once without our leave."

"But Ireland herself has changed more than your own fortunes," remarked Grounsell.

"That's true—that's true," sighed the sick man. "I don't remember the best days of it, but I've heard of them often and often from my father. The fine old times, when Mount Dalton was filled with company from the ground to the slates, and two lords in the granary; a pipe of port wine in the hall, with a silver cup beside it; the Modereen hounds, huntsmen and all, living at rack and manger, as

many as fifty sitting down in the parlour, and I won't say how many in the servants' hall; the finest hunters in the west country in the stables—there was life for you! Show me the equal of that in the wide world."

"And what is the present condition of the scene of those festivities?" said Grounsell, with a calm, but searching look.

"The present condition?" echoed Dalton, starting up to a sitting posture, and grasping the curtain with a convulsive grip; "I can't tell you what it is to-day, this ninth of November, but I'll tell what it was when I left it, eighteen years ago. The house was a ruin; the lawn a common; the timber cut down; the garden a waste; the tenants beggared; the landlord an exile. That's a pleasant catalogue, isn't it?"

"But there must come a remedy for all this," remarked Grounsell, whose ideas were following out a very different channel.

"Do you mean by a poor-law? Is it by taxing the half ruined to feed the lazy? or by rooting out all that once was a gentry, to fill their places by greedy speculators from Manchester and Leeds? Is that your remedy? It's wishing it well I am! No; if you want to do good to the country, leave Ireland to be Ireland, and don't try to make Norfolk of her. Let her have her own Parliament, that knows the people and their wants. Teach her to have a pride in her own nationality, and not to be always looking at herself in shame beside her rich sister. Give her a word of kindness now and then, as you do the Scotch; but, above all, leave us to ourselves. We understand one another; you never did, nor never will. We quarrelled, and made friends again, and all went right with us. You came over with your Chancery Courts, and your police, and whenever we differed, you never stopped till we were beggared or hanged."

"You take a very original view of our efforts at civilization, I confess," said Grounsell, smiling.

"Civilization! Civilization! I hate the very sound of the word. It brings to my mind nothing but county gaols, bridewells, turnpikes, and ministers' money. If it wasn't for civilization, would there be a receiver over my

estate of Mount Dalton? Would the poor tenants be racked for the rent that I always gave time for? Would there be a big poor-house, with its ugly front staring to the highway, as they tell me there is, and a police barrack to keep it company, opposite? I tell you again, sir, that your meddling has done nothing but mischief. Our little quarrels you converted into serious animosities; our estrangements into the feuds of two opposing races; our very poverty, that we had grown accustomed to, you taught us to regard as a national disgrace, without ever instructing us how to relieve it; and there we are now on your hands—neither English in industry, nor Irish in submission—neither willing to work, nor content to be hungry!"

The doctor saw by the agitated look and tone of the sick man that the subject was one of too much excitement for him, and hastened to change the topic by jocularly expressing a hope that he might prove more successful with him than England had been with his countrymen.

"I doubt it, sir," said Dalton, gravely; "not thanking you the less for your kindness. I believe, like my poor country, that I'm past doctoring." He paused for a few seconds, and then added: "It's all fretting. It's thinking about the girls, Frank—there is no fear of. That's what ails me."

Grounsell saw that to prolong his visit would be but to encourage a tone of depression that must prove injurious; so promising to return to see him in the morning, he shook Dalton's hand cordially, and followed Hans into the adjoining room, where writing materials were prepared for him.

The two girls were standing at the fire as he entered; and simple as was their dress, homely even to poverty, every trait of their costume, their looks, bespoke them of gentle blood. Their anxious glances as he came forward showed their eagerness to hear his tidings; but they did not speak a word.

"Do not be uneasy, young ladies," said he, hastening to relieve their fears. "Your father's illness has nothing serious about it. A few days will, I trust, see him per-

fectly restored to health. Meanwhile, you are his best physicians, who can minister to his spirits and cheer him up."

"Since my brother left us, sir, he appeared to sink hour by hour; he cannot get over the shock," said Ellen.

"I never knew him to give way before," interposed Kate. "He used to say, when anything grieved him, 'he'd pay some one to fret for him.'"

"With better health you'll see his old courage return." said the doctor, as he hastily wrote a few lines of prescription, and then laying his head in his hand, seemed for some minutes lost in thought. There were little comforts, matters of trifling luxury he wished to order, and yet he hesitated, for he did not know how far they were compatible with their means; nor could he venture upon the hazard of offending by questioning them. As in his uncertainty he raised his eyes, they fell upon the wooden figure which the dwarf had exhibited in the apothecary's shop, and which now stood upon a table near. It was a child sleeping at the foot of a cross, around which its arms were entwined. The emaciated limbs and wasted cheek portrayed fasting and exhaustion, while in the attitude itself, sleep seemed verging upon death.

"What is that?" asked he, hastily, as he pointed with his pen to the object.

"A poor child was found thus, frozen to death upon the Arlberg," said Kate; "and my sister carved that figure from a description of the event."

"Your sister! This was done by *you*" said Grounsell, slowly, as he turned his gaze from the work to the artist.

"Yes," cried Hans, whose face beamed with delight; "is it not 'lieblich;' is it not vonderful? Dass, I say, alway; none have taste now—none have de love to admire!"

Stooping down to examine it better, Grounsell was struck by the expression of the face, whereon a smile of a trustfulness and hope seemed warring with the rigid lines of coming death; so that the impression conveyed was more of a victory over suffering than of a terrible fate.

"She is self-taught, sir; none even so much as assisted her by advice," said Kate proudly.

"That will be perhaps but too apparent from my efforts," said Ellen, smiling faintly.

"I'm no artist, young lady," said Grounsell, bluntly, "but I am well versed in every variety of the human expression in suffering, and of mere truth to nature I can speak confidently. This is a fine work!—nay, do not blush, I am not a flatterer. May I take it with me, and show it to others more conversant with art than I am?"

"Upon one condition you may," said the girl, in a low, deep voice.

"Be it so; on any condition you wish."

"We are agreed, then?"

"Perfectly."

"The figure is yours—— Nay, sir—your promise!"

Grounsell stammered, and blushed, and looked confused; indeed, no man was less able to extricate himself from any position of embarrassment; and here the difficulties pressed on every side, for while he scrupled to accept what he deemed a gift of real value, he felt that they too had a right to free themselves from the obligation that his presence as a doctor imposed. At last he saw nothing better than to yield; and in all the confusion of a bashfully awkward man, he mumbled out his acknowledgments and catching up the figure, departed.

Hans alone seemed dissatisfied at the result, for as he cast his wistful looks after the wooden image, his eyes swam with his tears, and he muttered as he went some words of deep desponding cadence.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIRST VISIT.

THE dreary weather of November showed no signs of "taking up." Lowering days of fog and gloom alternated with cold winds and sleet, so that all out-door occupation was utterly denied to that imprisoned party, who were left with so few resources to pass the time within. It is true they did not make the best of the bad. Lady Hester grew hourly more irritable and peevish. Sydney Onslow seldom left her room. George took to the hills every morning, and never returned before a late dinner; while the doctor, when not with Sir Stafford, spent all his time at the Daltons', with whom he had already established a close intimacy.

Lady Hester had exhausted every possible means she could imagine to while away the hours; she had spent whole days in letter-writing—folios of "tirades"—to every one she could think of. She had all the carriages inspected, and the imperials searched, for books she well knew had been left behind. She had sent for the landlord's daughter to give her lessons in German, which she thought of learning during the week. She had given a morning to the Italian boy with his white mice, and pored for hours long over the "Livre des Voyageurs," reading the names of friends who, with better fortune, had taken their departure for Italy. But at last there came an end even to these frail resources, and she was left utterly without an occupation to engage, or even a thought to employ her. The five minutes of morning altercation with Grounsell over, the dreary time was unbroken by a single event, or unchequered by a single hope. Sir Stafford was indeed recovering, but so slowly that weeks might be required ere he could proceed on his journey How were they to be passed? was the fearful question to which she could find no answer. She looked with actual

envy at the party of boors who played at dominoes in the beer-house opposite, and followed with longing eyes the little mail-cart as it left the village. If she could read German, there were scores of books at her service. If she could but take a charitable turn, there was poverty enough to give her occupation from morn till night. She never knew what it was to think seriously, for meditation is the manufacture that cannot work without its raw material, and with this her mind was not stored.

It was in this pitiable frame of mind she was walking up and down the drawing-room one morning, just as the doctor had taken his departure, and with him the last little scene that was to relieve the day, when the servant entered with the card of Colonel Haggerstone, and the daily-repeated inquiry for Sir Stafford's health.

Had the gallant colonel presented himself at Wilton Crescent, or the Villa, it is more than likely that the well-instructed porter had not viséd his passport, but at once consigned a name of such unimposing consonants to gentle obscurity, while such an entry in the visiting-book had been coolly set down as a mistake. Not so now, however. Lady Hester took up the card, and, instead of the habitual curt rejoinder—"Sir Stafford is better," said, "You may tell Colonel Haggerstone that Lady Hester will receive him."

The gallant colonel, who was negligently slapping his boots with his riding-whip below stairs, was not a little amazed at the message. There had been a time when he would have interpreted the favour most flatteringly. He would have whispered to himself, "She has seen me passing the window—she was struck with me as I rode by." Time had, however, toned down these bright illusions, and he read the permission with a nearer approach to truth, as a fine-lady caprice in a moment of ennui. "I thought as much," muttered he to himself as he slowly ascended the stairs; "the blockade was too strictly enforced not to tell at last. No newspapers, no books—ha! ha! Couldn't help surrendering!"

The colonel had by this time given his whiskers and moustaches the last curl, thrown back his head into a position of calm dignity, as the servant, throwing wide

the folding-doors, announced him. Advancing two paces and bowing low, Colonel Haggerstone said, "Your ladyship will pardon the liberty—the very great liberty—I have taken in my respectful inquiries for some days past, but although probably not remembered by Sir Stafford, I once *did* enjoy the honour of his acquaintance—we met at Lord Kerrison's, in Scotland."

Lady Onslow cut short this very uninteresting explanation by a bland but somewhat supercilious smile, that seemed to say, "What possible matter can it be?" while at the same time she motioned him to be seated.

"May I hope that Sir Stafford continues to improve?" said he, bowing again.

"He's better to-day," said Lady Onslow, languidly. "Perhaps as well as any one can be in this wretched place. You heard, I suppose, of the series of misfortunes that befell us, and compelled us to return here?"

The colonel looked mildly compassionate and inquisitive. He anticipated the possible pleasure her ladyship might feel in a personal narrative, and he was an accomplished listener. This time, however, he was wrong. Lady Onslow either did not think the occasion or the audience worth the trouble of the exertion, and merely said, "We had a break-down somewhere with an odious name. Sir Stafford would travel by that road through the Höhlen Thal, where somebody made his famous march. Who was it?"

"Massena, I think," said the colonel, at a haphazard, thinking that at least the name was *ben trovato*, just as Sunday-school children father everything remarkable on John the Baptist.

"Oh dear no; it was Moreau. We stopped to breakfast at the little inn where he held his head-quarters, and in the garden of which he amused himself in pistol-shooting—strange, was it not? Are you a good shot, colonel?"

"Good among bad ones," said the colonel, modestly.

"Then we must have a match. I am so fond of it! You have pistols, of course?"

"I am fortunate enough to have a case of Schlessinger's best, and at your ladyship's disposal."

"Well, that is agreed upon. You'll be kind enough to

select a suitable spot in the garden, and if to-morrow be fine—— By the way, what is to-morrow—not Sunday, I hope?"

The colonel relieved her anxieties by the assurance that the next day would be Monday, consequently that the present one was Sunday.

"How strange! One does make sad confusion in these things abroad," said she, sighing. "I think we are better in England in that respect, don't you?"

The question was not a very clear one, but the colonel never hesitated to give in his adhesion.

"Sir Stafford always took that view in the House, and consequently differed from his party, as well as about Ireland. Poor dear Ireland! what is to be done for her?"

This was a rather more embarrassing demand than the previous one, and the colonel hemmed and coughed, and prepared for a speech of subtle generalities; but the dexterity was all unnecessary, for her ladyship had already forgotten the theme, and everything about it, as she went on. "How I pity those dear Wreckingtons, who are condemned to live there! The earl, you know, had promised solemnly that he would go any lengths for the party when he got his blue riband; and so they took him at his word, and actually named him to the viceroyalty. It was a very cruel thing, but I hear nothing could be better than his conduct on hearing it: and dear Lady Wreckington insisted upon accompanying him. It was exactly like the story of—what's that man's name, who assisted in the murder of the Emperor Paul—Geroboffskoi, or something like that, and whose wife followed him to the mines."

The colonel avowed that the cases were precisely alike, and now the conversation—if the word can be degraded to mean that bald disjointed chat—ran upon London people and events—their marriages, their dinners, their separations, coalitions, divorces, and departures; on all which themes Haggerstone affected a considerable degree of knowledge, although, to any one less occupied with herself than her ladyship, it would have been at once apparent that all his information was derived from the newspapers. It was at the close of a lamentation on the

utter stupidity of everything and everywhere, that he adroitly asked where she meant to pass the winter.

"I wish I knew," said she, languidly. "The Dollingtons say Naples; the Upsleys tell us Rome; and, for my part, I pronounce for neither. Lady Dollington is my aversion, and the three Upsley girls, with their pink noses and red hair, are insufferable."

"What does your ladyship think of Florence?" asked the colonel, soothingly.

"Pretty much what I might of one of the Tonga Islands. I know nothing of the place, the people, or the climate. Pray tell me about it."

"There is very little to say," said Haggerstone, shrugging his shoulders; "not but the place might be very agreeable, if there were some one of really fashionable standing to take the lead and give a tone to the society; some one who would unite indispensable rank and wealth with personal graces, and thus, as it were, by prescriptive right, assume the first place. Then, I say, Florence would be second to no city of Italy. Would that your ladyship would condescend to accept the vacant throne!"

"I!" said she, affecting astonishment; and then laughingly added: "Oh no! I detest mock sovereignty. I actually shudder at the idea of the lady-patroness part; besides, whom should one have to reign over? Not the Browns, and Smiths, and Perkinses; not the full-pensioned East Indians, the half-pay colonels, and the no-pay Irish gentilities, that form the staple of small city society. You surely would not recommend me to such a sad pre-eminence."

The colonel smiled flatteringly at her ladyship's smartness, and hastened to assure her that such heresy was far from his thoughts; and then with a practised readiness ran over a list of foreign celebrities—French, Russian, and German—whose names, at least, clinked like the true metal.

This looked promisingly; it was very like cutting all English society, and had the appearance of something very exclusive, very impertinent, and very ungenerous; and now she lent a willing ear as Haggerstone revealed a plan of operations for a whole winter campaign. According

to his account, it was a perfect *terra incognita*, where the territorial limits and laws might be laid down at will; it was a state which called for a great dictatorship, and the sway of unlimited authority.

Now, Lady Hester had never—at least since her marriage, and very rarely even before it—been more than on the periphery of fashionable society. When she did obtain a footing within the charmed circle, it was by no prescriptive right, but rather on some ground of patronage, or some accidental political crisis, which made Sir Stafford's influence a matter of moment. There was, therefore, a flattery in the thought of thus becoming a leader in society; and she shrewdly remembered, that though there might be little real power, there would be all the tyranny of a larger sovereignty.

It is true she suffered no symptom of this satisfaction to escape her; on the contrary, she compassionated the "poor dear things" that thought themselves "the world," in such a place, and smiled with angelic pity at their sweet simplicity; but Haggerstone saw through all these disguises, and read her real sentiments, as a practised toad-eater never fails to do, where only affectation is the pretence. Adroitly avoiding to press the question, he adverted to Baden and its dreary weather; offered his books, his newspapers, his horses, his phaeton, and everything that was his, even his companionship as a guide to the best riding or walking roads, and, like a clever actor, made his exit at the very moment when his presence became most desirable.

Lady Hester looked out of the window, and saw, in the street beneath, the saddle-horses of the colonel, which were led up and down by a groom in the most accurate of costumes. The nags themselves, too, were handsome and in top condition. It was a little gleam of civilization, in the midst of universal barrenness, that brought up memories, some of which at least were not devoid of pain, so far as the expression of her features might be trusted. "I wonder who he can be?" said she, musing. "It's a shocking name! Haggerstone. Perhaps Sir Stafford may remember him. It's very sad to think that one should be reduced to such people." So, with a slight

sigh, she sat down to indulge in a mood of deep and sincere commiseration for herself and her sorrows.

From these reveries she was aroused by the arrival of a package of books and papers from the colonel. They included some of the latest things of the day, both French and English, and were exactly the kind of reading she cared for, that half-gossipry that revolves around a certain set, and busies itself about the people and incidents of one very small world. There were books of travel by noble authors, and novels by titled authoresses; the one as tamely well bred and tiresome as the others were warm and impassioned—no bad corroborative evidence, by the way, of the French maxim, that the "safety of the Lady Georginas has an immense relation to the coldness of the Lord Georges." There were books of beauty, wherein loveliness was most aristocratic; and annuals where nobility condescended to write twaddle. There were analyses of new operas, wherein the list of the spectators was the only matter of interest, and better than these were the last fashions of "Longchamps," the newest bulletins of that great campaign which began in Adam's garden, and will endure to the "very crack of doom."

Lady Hester's spirits rallied at once from these well-timed stimulants; and when the party gathered together before dinner, George and his sister were amazed at the happy change in her manner.

"I have had a visitor," said she, after a short mystification; "a certain colonel, who assumes to be known to your father, but I fancy will scarcely be remembered by him—he calls himself Haggerstone."

"Haggerstone!" said George, repeating the name twice or thrice. "Is not that the name of the man who was always with Arlington, and of whom all the stories are told?"

"As I never heard of Arlington's companion, nor the stories in question, I can't say. Pray enlighten us," said Lady Hester, tartly.

"Haggerstone sounds so like the name," repeated George to himself.

"So like what name? Do be good enough to explain."

"I am unwilling to tell a story which, if not justly

attributable to the man, will certainly attach unpleasantly to his name hereafter."

"And in your excessive caution for yourself, you are pleased to forget *me*, Mr. Onslow. Pray remember that if I admit him to acquaintance——,"

"But surely you don't mean to do so?"

"And why not?"

"In the first place, you know nothing about him."

"Which is *your* fault."

"Be it so. I have at least told you enough to inspire reserve and caution."

"Quite enough to suggest curiosity and give a degree of interest to a very commonplace character."

"Is he young, may I ask?" said George, with a half smile.

"No, far from it."

"Good-looking?"

"Just as little."

"Very agreeable and well-mannered?"

"Rather prosy, and too military in tone for my taste."

"Does he come under the recommendatory 'firman' of any dear friend or acquaintance?"

"Nothing of the kind. There is his passport," said she, pointing to his visiting ticket.

"Your ladyship used to be more difficult of access," said George, dryly.

"Very true; and so I may possibly become again. To make selections from the world of one's acquaintance is a very necessary duty; but, as my father used to say, no one thinks of using a sieve for chaff."

"This gentleman is, then, fortunate in his obscurity."

"Here comes Miss Onslow," said Lady Hester, "who will probably be more grateful to me when she learns that our solitude is to be enlivened by the gallant colonel."

Sydney scanned over the books and journals on the table, and then quietly remarked, "If a man is to be judged of by his associates, these do not augur very favourably for the gentleman's taste."

"I see that you are both bent on making him a favourite of mine," said Lady Hester, pettishly; "and if Dr. Groun-

sell will only discover some atrocious circumstance in his history or character, I shall be prepared to call him 'charming.'"

The announcement of dinner fortunately broke up a discussion that already promised unfavourably; nor were any of the party sorry at the interruption.

CHAPTER VII.

A LESSON IN PISTOL-SHOOTING.

THERE are two great currents which divide public opinion in the whole world, and all mankind may be classed into one or other of these wide categories—"the people who praise, and the people who abuse everything." In certain sets, all is as it ought to be, in this life. Everybody is good, dear, and amiable. All the men are gifted and agreeable; all the women fascinating and pretty. An indiscriminate shower of laudations falls upon everything or everybody, and the only surprise the hearer feels is how a world, so chuck full of excellence, can possibly consist with what one reads occasionally in the *Times* and the *Chronicle*.

The second category is the Roland to this Oliver, and embraces those who have a good word for nobody, and in whose estimation the globe is one great penal settlement —the overseers being neither more nor less than the best-conducted among the convicts. The chief business of these people in life is to chronicle family disgraces and misfortunes, to store their memories with defalcations, frauds, suicides, disreputable transactions at play, unfair duels, seductions, and the like, and to be always prepared, on the first mention of a name, to connect its owner, or

his grandmother, with some memorable blot, or some unfortunate event of years before. If the everlasting laudations of the one set make life too sweet to be wholesome, the eternal disparagement of the other renders it too bitter to be enjoyable; nor would it be easy to say whether society suffers more from the exercise of this mock charity on the one side, or the practice of universal malevolence on the other.

Perhaps our readers will feel grateful when we assure them that we are not intent upon pushing the investigation further. The consideration was forced upon us by thinking of Colonel Haggerstone, who was a distinguished member of class No. 2. His mind was a police sheet, or rather like a page of that celebrated "Livre Noir," wherein all the unexpiated offences of a nation are registered. He knew the family disasters of all Europe, and not a name could be mentioned in society to which he could not tag either a seduction, a fraud, a swindle, or a poltroonery; and when such revelations are given prosaically, with all the circumstances of date, time, and place, unrelieved by the slightest spice of wit or imagination, but simply narrated as "Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire" of an individual, the world is very apt to accept them as evidences of knowledge of life, rather than what they really are—proofs of a malignant disposition. In this way, Haggerstone seemed to many the mere "old soldier," and nothing more; whereas, if nature had given him either fancy or epigrammatic smartness, he would have been set down for the incarnation of slander.

It may seem strange that Lady Hester, who had lived a good deal in the world, should never have met a character of this type, but so it was; she belonged to a certain "fast set" in society, who seem to ask for a kind of indemnity for all they do, by never, on any occasion, stopping to criticize their neighbours. This semblance of good nature is a better defensive armour than the uninitiated know of, enlisting all loose sympathies with its possessor, and even gaining for its advocates that great floating majority who speak much and think little.

In London, Haggerstone would have at once appeared the very worst "ton," and she would have avoided the

acquaintance of a man so unhappily gifted; but here, at Baden, with nothing to do, none to speak to, he became actually a prize, and she listened to him for hours with pleasure as he recounted all the misdeeds of those "dear, dear friends" who had made up her own "world." There was at heart, too, the soothing flattery that whispered, "He can say nothing of *me;* the worst he can hint is, that I married a man old enough to be my father, and if I did, I am heartily sorry for the mistake."

He was shrewd enough soon to detect the family differences that prevailed, and to take advantage of them, not by any imprudent or ill-advised allusion to what would have enlisted her ladyship's pride in opposition, but by suggesting occupations and amusements that he saw would be distasteful to the others, and thus alienate her more and more from their companionship. In fact, his great object was to make Lady Hester a disciple of that new school which owns Georges Sand for its patron, and calls itself "Lionne." It would be foreign to our purpose here were we to stop and seek to what social causes this new sect owes existence. In a great measure it may be traced to the prevailing taste of men for club life—to that lounging ease which exacts no tribute of respect or even attention, but suffers men to indulge their caprices to any extent of selfishness; thus unfitting them for ladies' society, or only such society as that of ladies condescending enough to unsex themselves, and to talk upon themes and discuss subjects that usually are reserved for other audiences.

Certain clever men liked this liberty—these receptions were a kind of free port, where all could be admitted duty free. Nothing was forbidden in this wide tariff, and so, conversation, emancipated from the restriction of better society, permitted a thousand occasions of display, that gradually attracted people to these reunions, and made all other society appear cold, formal, and hypocritical by contrast. This new invention had not reached England when Lady Hester quitted it, but she listened to a description of its merits with considerable interest. There were many points, too, in which it chimed in with her notions. It had novelty, liberty, and unbounded caprice amongst

its recommendations; and lastly, it was certain to outrage the "Onslows." It was a "part" which admitted of any amount of interpolations. Under its sanction she would be free to say anything, know any one, and go anywhere. Blessed immunity that permitted all and denied nothing!

With all the vulgar requirements of "Lionism" she was already sufficiently conversant. She could ride, drive, shoot, and fence; was a very tolerable billiard-player, and could row a little. But with the higher walks of the craft she had made no acquaintance; she had not learned to swim, had never smoked, and was in dark ignorance of that form of language which, half mystical and all-mischievous, is in vogue with the members of this sect. That she could acquire all these things rapidly and easily the colonel assured her, and, by way of "matriculating," reminded her of her challenge respecting the pistol-shooting, for which he had made every preparation in the garden of the hotel.

True to his word, he had selected a very pretty alley, at the end of which rose a wall sufficiently high to guard against accidents from stray shots. On a table were displayed, in all the dandyism such objects are capable of, a handsome case of pistols, with all the varied appliances of kid leather for wadding, bullet-moulds, rammers, hammers, screws, and rests, even to a russia-leather bound note-book, to record the successes, nothing had been forgotten; and Lady Hester surveyed with pleasure preparations which at least implied an anxious attention to her wishes.

"Only fancy the barbarism of the land we live in," said he; "I have sent emissaries on every side to seek for some of those plaster images so common in every city of Europe, but in vain. Instead of your ladyship cutting off Joan of Arc's head, or sending your bullet through some redoubtable enemy of England, you must waste your prowess and skill upon an ignoble jar of porcelain, or a vase of Bohemian glass; unless, indeed, my last messenger shall have proved more fortunate, and I believe such is the case." As he spoke, his servant came up with a small parcel carefully enveloped in paper."

"I have got this figure, sir," said he, "with the greatest

difficulty, and only indeed by pretending we wanted it as an ornamental statue. The little fellow of the toy-shop parted with it in tears, as if it had been his brother."

"It is very beautiful!" said Lady Hester, as she surveyed a small wooden statue of Goethe's "Marguerite," in the attitude of plucking the petals of a flower to decide upon her lover's fidelity.

"A mere toy!" said Haggerstone. "These things are carved by every child in the Black Forest. Does your ladyship think you could hit the feather of her cap without hurting the head?"

"I couldn't think of such profanation," replied she; "there is really something very pretty in the attitude and expression. Pray let us reserve her for some less terrible destiny."

But the colonel persisted in assuring her that these were the commonest knick-knacks that adorned every peasant's cabin—that every boor with a rusty knife carved similar figures, and in the midst of his explanations he placed the statue upon a little stone pillar about twenty paces off.

Lady Hester's objection had been little more than a caprice; indeed, had she been convinced that the figure was a valuable work of art, she would have felt rather flattered than otherwise at the costliness of the entertainment provided for her. Like Cleopatra's pearl, it would have had the charm of extravagance at least; but she never gave the colonel credit for such gallantry, and the more readily believed all he said on the subject.

Colonel Haggerstone proceeded to load the pistols with all that pomp and circumstance so amusingly displayed by certain people on like occasions. The bullets, encased in little globes of chamois, carefully powdered with emery, were forced down the barrels by a hammer, the hair trigger adjusted, and the weapon delivered to Lady Hester with due solemnity.

"If I go wide of the mark, colonel, I beg you to remember that I have not had a pistol in my hand for above three years; indeed, it must be nearly four years since I shot a match with Lord Norwood."

"Lord Norwood! indeed!" said Haggerstone. "I

wasn't aware that your ladyship had ever been his antagonist."

Had not Lady Hester been herself anxious to hide the confusion the allusion to the viscount always occasioned her, she could not have failed to remark how uncomfortably astonished was Haggerstone at the mention of that name. Nervously eager to do something—anything that might relieve her embarrassment—she pulled the trigger; but the aim was an erring one, and no trace of the bullet to be seen.

"There's no use in looking for it, Colonel Haggerstone," said she, pettishly; "I'm certain I was very wide of the mark."

"I'm positive I saw the plaster drop from the wall somewhere hereabouts," said the complaisant colonel, pointing to a spot close beside the figure. "Yes, and the twigs are broken here."

"No matter; I certainly missed, and that's quite enough. I told you I should, before I fired; and when one has the anticipation of failure, it is so easy to vindicate the impression."

It was in evident chagrin at her want of success that she spoke, and all her companion's flatteries went for nothing. Meanwhile, he presented the second pistol, which, taking hastily, and without giving herself time for an aim, she discharged with a like result.

"I'll not try again," said she, pettishly. "Either the pistols don't suit me, or the place or the light is bad. Something is wrong, that's certain."

Haggerstone bit his lip in silence, and went on reloading the pistols without trusting himself to reply. A little conflict was going on within him, and all his intended flatteries for her ladyship were warring with the desire to display his own skill, for he was a celebrated shot, and not a little vain of the accomplishment. Vanity carried the day at last, and taking up the weapon, he raised it slowly to a level with his eye. A second or two he held it thus, his hand steady as a piece of marble.

"I have taken my aim, and now you may give the word for me to fire when you please," said he, turning his eyes from the object, and looking straight at Lady Hester.

She stared at him, as if to reassure herself of the direction of his glance, and then called out "Fire!" The shot rang out clear and sharp; with it arose a shrill cry of agony, and straight before them, at the foot of the pillar, lay something which looked like a roll of clothes, only that by its panting motion it indicated life. Haggerstone sprang forward, and to his horror discovered the dwarf, Hans Roëckle, who, with his arm broken, lay actually bathed in blood. With his remaining hand he clasped the little statue to his bosom, while he muttered to himself the words "Gerettet!—saved! saved!"

While Lady Hester hurried for assistance, Haggerstone bound up the bleeding vessels with his handkerchief; and in such German as he could command, asked how the accident had befallen.

A few low muttering sounds were all the dwarf uttered, but he kissed the little image with a devotion that seemed like insanity. Meanwhile, the colonel's servant, coming up, at once recognized Hans, and exclaimed, "It is the little fellow of the toy-shop, sir. I told you with what reluctance he parted with this figure. He must be mad, I think."

The wild looks and eager expressions of the dwarf, as he clutched the image and pressed it to his heart, seemed to warrant the suspicion; and Haggerstone thought he could read insanity in every line of the poor creature's face. To the crowd that instantaneously gathered around the inn door, and which included many of his friends and acquaintances, Hans would give no other explanation of the event than that it was a mere accident; that he was passing, and received the shot by chance; nothing more.

"Is he not mad, or a fool?" asked Haggerstone of the innkeeper.

"Neither, sir; Hans Roëckle is an old and respected burgher of our town, and although eccentric and odd in his way, is not wanting for good sense or good nature."

"Ay! ay!" cried two or three of his townsfolk, to whom the landlord translated the colonel's question; "Hans is a kind-hearted fellow, and if he loves his dolls and wooden images over-much, he never lacks in affection for living creatures."

While these and such-like observations were making around him, the dwarf's wounds were being dressed by his friend, Ludwig Kraus—an operation of considerable pain, that the little fellow bore with heroic tranquillity. Not a word of complaint, not a syllable of impatience escaped him, and while from his half-closed lips a low muttered exclamation of "Saved! saved!" came forth from time to time, the bystanders deemed it the utterance of gratitude for his own escape with life.

But once only did any expression of irritation burst from him. It was when Haggerstone pulled out his purse, and with an ostentatious display of munificence asked him to name his recompense. "Take me home; take me hence!" said Hans, impatiently. "Tell the rich 'Englander' that there are wounds for which sorrow would be an ample cure, but there are others which insult is sure to fester."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT EXCURSION.

THE remainder of the day after the dwarf's misfortune was passed by Lady Hester in a state of feverish irritability. Sorry as she felt for the "sad accident"—her own phrase, she was still more grieved for the effects it produced upon herself; the jar and worry of excited feelings —the uncomfortableness of being anxious about anything or anybody.

Epicurean in her code of manners as of morals, she detested whatever occasioned even a passing sensation of dissatisfaction, and hence upon the luckless colonel, the author of the present evil, fell no measured share of her displeasure. "He should have taken precautions against such a mishap—he ought to have had sufficient presence of mind to have arrested his aim—he should have fired in the air—in fact, he ought to have done anything but what he did do;" which was to agitate the nerves, and irritate the sensibilities, of a fine lady.

The conduct of the family, too, was the very reverse of soothing Sir Stafford's gout had relapsed on hearing of the event. George Onslow's anger was such that he could not trust himself to speak of the occurrence; and as for Sydney, though full of sorrow for the dwarf, she had not a single sympathy to bestow upon her stepmother. "Were there ever such people?" she asked herself again and again. Not one had taken the trouble to ask how *she* bore up, or express the slightest anxiety for the consequences the shock might occasion *her*.

Grounsell was actually insufferable; and even hinted that if anything untoward were to happen, the very grave question might arise as to the guilt of the parties who appeared in arms without a Government permission. He reminded her ladyship that they were not

in England, but in a land beset with its own peculiar prejudices and notions, and in nothing so rigorous as in the penalties on accidents that took their origin in illegality.

As for the wound itself, he informed her that the bullet had "traversed the deltoid, but without dividing the brachial artery; and, for the present, sympathetic fever and subcutaneous inflammation would be the worst consequences." These tidings were neither very reassuring nor intelligible; but all her cross-examination could elicit little better.

"Has Colonel Haggerstone been to see him?" asked she.

"No, madam. His groom called with a present of two florins."

"Oh! impossible, sir."

"Perfectly true, madam. I was present when the money was returned to the man by a young lady, whose attentions to the sufferer saved him the pain this indignity would have cost him."

"A young lady, did you say? How does he happen to be so fortunate in his attendance?"

"Her father chances to be this poor creature's tenant, and many mutual acts of kindness have passed between them."

"Not even scandal could asperse her motives in the present case," said Lady Hester, with an insolent laugh. "It looked hardly human when they lifted it from the ground."

"Scandal has been guilty of as gross things, madam," said Grounsell, sternly, "but I would defy her here, although there is beauty enough to excite all her malevolence." And with this speech, delivered with a pointedness there was no mistaking, the doctor left the room.

Impressions, or what she herself would have called "feelings," chased each other so rapidly through Lady Hester's mind, that her whole attention was now directed to the young lady of whom Grounsell spoke, and whose singular charity excited all her curiosity. There is a strange tendency to imitation among those whose intelli-

gences lie unexercised by any call of duty or necessity. No suggestion coming from within, they look without themselves for occupation and amusement. Lady Hester was a prominent disciple of this school. All her life she had been following, eager to see whether the fashions that became, or the pleasures that beguiled, others, might not suit herself. If such a course of existence inevitably conduces to ennui and discontent, it is no less difficult to strive against, and they who follow in the track of others' footsteps have all the weariness of the road without the cheering excitement of the journey.

If the young lady found pleasure in charity, why shouldn't she? Benevolence, too, for aught she knew, might be very becoming. There were a hundred little devices of costume and manner which might be adopted to display it. What a pretty version of the good Samaritan modernized one might give in a Shetland scarf and a cottage bonnet—the very thing Chalons would like to paint; and what an effective "interior" might be made of the dwarf's chamber, crowded with rude peasant faces, all abashed and almost awe-struck as she entered.

The longer she dwelt upon the theme the more fascinating it became. "It would be really worth while to realize," said she to herself at last—"so amusing—and so odd, an actual adventure; besides, in point of fact, it was her duty to look after this poor creature." Just so: there never was a frivolous action, or a notion struck out by passing folly, for which its author could not find a justification in PRINCIPLE! We are everlastingly declaring against the knaveries and deceptions practised on us in life; but if we only took count of the cheats we play off upon ourselves, we should find that there are no such impostors as our own hearts.

Nobody was ever less likely to make this discovery than Lady Hester. She believed herself everything that was good and amiable; she knew that she was handsome. Whatever contrarieties she met with in life, she was quite certain they came not from any fault of hers; and if self-esteem could give happiness she must have enjoyed it. But it cannot. The wide neutral territory between what we think of ourselves and others think of us, is filled with

daring enemies to our peace, and it is impossible to venture into it without a wound of self-love.

To make her visit to the dwarf sufficient of an adventure, it must be done in secret. Nobody should know it but Célestine, her maid, who should accompany her. Affecting a slight indisposition, she could retire to her room in the evening, and then there would be abundant time to put her plan into execution. Even these few precautions against discovery were needless, for George did not return to dinner on that day, and Sydney made a headache an excuse for not appearing.

Nothing short of the love of adventure and the indulgence of a caprice could have induced Lady Hester to venture out in such a night. The rain fell in torrents, and swooped along the narrow streets in channels swollen to the size of rivulets. The river itself, fed by many a mountain stream, fell tumbling over the rocks with a deafening roar, amid which the crashing branches of the pine-trees were heard at intervals. What would not have been her anxieties and lamentings if exposed to such a storm when travelling, surrounded with all the appliances that wealth can compass! and yet now, of her own free will, she wended her way on foot through the darkness and the hurricane, not only without complaining, but actually excited to a species of pleasure in the notion of her imaginary heroism.

The courier who preceded her, as guide, enjoyed no such agreeable illusions, but muttered to himself, as he went, certain reflections by no means complimentary to the whims of fine ladies; while Mademoiselle Célestine inwardly protested that anything, "not positively wrong," would be dearly purchased by the dangers of such an excursion.

"Grégoire! Grégoire! where is he now!" exclaimed Lady Hester, as she lost sight of her guide altogether.

"Here, miladi," grunted out the courier, in evident pain; "I fail to break my neck over de stone bench."

"Where's the lantern, Grégoire?"

"Blowed away, zum Teufel, I believe."

"What's he saying, Célestine?—what does he mean?"

But mademoiselle could only answer by a sob of agony

over her *capote de Paris*, flattened to her head like a Highland bonnet.

"Have you no light? You must get a light, Grégoire."

"Impossible, miladi; dere's nobody livin' in dese houses at all."

"Then you must go back to the inn for one; we'll wait here till you return."

A faint shriek from Mademoiselle Célestine expressed all the terror such a proposition suggested.

"Miladi will be lost if she remain here all alone."

"Perdue! sans doute!" exclaimed Célestine.

"I am determined to have my way. Do as I bade you, Grégoire; return for a light, and we'll take such shelter as this door affords in the meanwhile."

It was in no spirit of general benevolence that Grégoire tracked his road back to the "Russie," since, if truth must be told, he himself had extinguished the light, in the hope of forcing Lady Hester to a retreat. Muttering a choice selection of those pleasant phrases with which his native German abounds, he trudged along, secretly resolving that he would allow his mistress a reasonable interval of time to reflect over her madcap expedition. Meanwhile, Lady Hester and her maid stood shivering and storm-beaten beneath the drip of a narrow eave. The spirit of opposition alone sustained her ladyship at this conjuncture, for she was wet through, her shoes soaked with rain, and the cold blast that swept along seemed as if it would freeze the very blood in her heart.

Célestine could supply but little of comfort or consolation, and kept repeating the words, "Quelle aventure! quelle aventure!" in every variety of lamentation.

"He could easily have been back by this," said Lady Hester, after a long pause, and an anxious attention to every sound that might portend his coming: "I'm certain it is full half an hour since he left us. What a night!"

"Et quelle aventure!" exclaimed Célestine, anew.

None knew better than Lady Hester the significant depreciation of the Frenchwoman's phrase, and how differently had she rated all the hazards of the enterprise if any compromise of character were to have followed it.

However, it was no time for discussion, and she let it pass.

"If he should have missed the way, and not be able to find us!" she said, after another pause.

"We shall be found dead in the morning," cried Célestine; "et pour quelle aventure, mon Dieu, pour quelle aventure!"

The possibility that her fears suggested, and the increasing severity of the storm—for now the thunder rolled overhead, and the very ground seemed to shake with the reverberation—served to alarm Lady Hester, and for the first time she became frightened at their situation.

"We could scarcely find our way back, Célestine!" said she, rather in the tone of one asking for comfort than putting a question.

"Impossible, miladi."

"And Grégoire says that these houses are all uninhabited."

"Quelle aventure!" sobbed the maid.

"What can have become of him? It is more than an hour now! What was that, Célestine?—was it lightning?—there, don't you see it yonder, towards the end of the street? I declare it is Grégoire; I see the lantern."

A cry of joy burst from both together, for already hope had begun to wane, and a crowd of fearful anticipations had taken its place.

Lady Hester tried to call his name, but the clattering noise of the storm drowned the weak effort. The light, however, came nearer at each instant, and there was no longer any doubt of their rescue, when suddenly it turned and disappeared at an angle of the street. Lady Hester uttered a piercing cry, and at the instant the lantern was again seen, showing that the bearer had heard the sounds.

"Here, Gregoire, we are here!" exclaimed she, in her loudest voice, and speaking in English.

Whoever carried the lantern seemed for a moment uncertain how to act, for there was no reply, nor any change of position for a few seconds, when at length the light was seen approaching where Lady Hester stood.

"I think I heard an English voice," said one, whose accents proclaimed her to be a woman.

"Oh yes!" cried Lady Hester, passionately, "I am English. We have lost our way. Our courier went back to the inn for a lantern, and has never returned, and we are almost dead with cold and terror. Can you guide us to the Hôtel de Russie?"

"The house I live in is only a few yards off. It is better you should take shelter there for the present."

"Take care, miladi!" whispered Célestine, eagerly. "This may be a plot to rob and murder us."

"Have no fears on that score, mademoiselle," said the unknown, laughing, and speaking in French; "we are not very rich, but as surely we are perfectly safe company."

Few as these words were, there was in their utterance that indescribable tone of good breeding and ease which at once reassured Lady Hester, who now replied to her unseen acquaintance with the observance due to an equal, and willingly accepted the arm she offered for guidance and support.

"At the end of this little street, scarcely two minutes' walking, and you will be there," said the unknown.

Lady Hester scarcely heard the remark, as she ran on with voluble levity on the dangers they had run—the terrific storm—the desertion of the courier—her own fortitude—her maid's cowardice—what must have happened if they had not been discovered—till at last she bethought her of asking by what singular accident the other should have been abroad in such a terrible night.

"A neighbour and a friend of ours is very ill, madam, and I have been to the doctor's to fetch some medicine for him."

"And I, too, was bent upon a charitable errand," said Lady Hester, quite pleased with the opportunity of parading her own merits, "to visit a poor creature who was accidentally wounded this morning."

"It is Hans Roëckle, our poor neighbour, you mean," cried the other, eagerly; "and here we are at his house." And so saying, she pushed open a door, to which a bell, attached on the inside, gave speedy warning of their approach.

Dearest Kate!" cried a voice from within, "how uneasy I have been at your absence!" And the same moment a young girl appeared with a light, which, as she shaded with her hand, left her unaware of the presence of strangers.

"Think rather of this lady, and what *she* must have suffered," said Kate, as, drawing courteously back, she presented her sister to Lady Hester.

"Or rather, what I might have suffered," interposed Lady Hester, "but for the fortunate accident of your coming. A few moments back, as I stood shivering beneath the storm, I little thought that I should owe my rescue to a countrywoman. May I learn the name of one to whom I am so deeply indebted?"

"Dalton, madam," said Nelly; and then with a slight confusion, added, "we ought, perhaps, to tell the circumstances which induced my sister to be abroad at such an hour."

"She knows it all," broke in Kate, "and can the more readily forgive it, as it was her own errand. But will not this lady come near the fire?" said she, addressing Mademoiselle Célestine, who, as she followed the rest into the humble chamber, was bestowing a most depreciatory glance upon the place, the furniture, and the people.

"It is only my maid," said Lady Hester, carelessly. "And now it is time I should introduce myself, and say that Lady Hester Onslow owes you all her gratitude." Ellen curtseyed respectfully at the announcement, but Kate Dalton's cheek coloured slightly, and she bent a look of more than common admiration at the handsome figure of the stranger. An innate reverence for rank and title was rooted in her heart, and she was overjoyed to think that their chance acquaintance should be one of that class so distinctively marked out for honour. Prepared to admire every grace and fascination of the high-born, Kate watched with eager and delighted looks the slightest gestures, the least traits of manner, of the fashionable beauty. They were all attractions to which her heart gave a ready response. The accent in which she spoke, the careless elegance of her attitude as she lay back in her chair, the charming negligence with which

she wore the little portions of dress exchanged for her own, were all inimitable graces in the eye of the simple girl.

As for Lady Hester, accustomed to all the servile offices of her own attendants, to be punctiliously obeyed and waited on, it was yet a new sensation to watch the zealous and eager devotion with which the two sisters ministered to her wants. In utter forgetfulness of themselves, they had brought forth the little resources of their humble wardrobe, too happy, as it seemed, when they saw their services so willingly accepted. Fortunately, they did not perceive the contemptuous looks with which "mademoiselle" regarded their attentions, nor overheard her exclamation of "Mon Dieu! where did they gather together these *chiffons?*" as she surveyed the somewhat antiquated stores of their toilette.

Even had Lady Hester's good breeding not prompted a gracious reception of what was so generously offered, the very singularity of the scene would have had its charm in her estimation. She was delighted with everything, even to Kate Dalton's slippers, which, by a most happy flattery, were a little too large for her. She fancied, too, that her costume, curiously made up of shreds and patches the most incongruous, was the dress of an Irish peasant, and was in an ecstasy at the thought of a similar one at her next fancy ball. Besides all these internal sources of self-satisfaction, the admiration of the two sisters was another and more legitimate cause of pleasure; for even Ellen, with all her natural reserve and caution, was scarcely less impressed than Kate with the charm of those fascinations which, however destined but for one class of society, are equally successful in all.

Ellen Dalton's life had not been devoid of trials, nor had they failed to teach their own peculiar lessons; and yet her experiences had not shown her how very like right feeling good breeding can be, and how closely good manners may simulate every trait of a high and generous nature.

CHAPTER IX.

A FINE LADY'S BLANDISHMENTS.

We left Lady Hester, in our last chapter, employed in the exercise of those fascinations which, however unlike in other respects, have this resemblance to virtue, that they are assuredly their own reward. The charm of courtesy never conferred one-half the pleasure on those for whom it was exercised as to him who wielded it. It matters little whether the magician be prince or "charlatan," the art of pleasing is one of the most agreeable faculties human nature can be endowed with. Whether Lady Hester was aware of the theory or not, she felt the fact, as she saw the undisguised admiration in the faces of the two sisters; for while she had won over Nelly by the elevation of her sentiments and the kindness of her expressions, Kate was fascinated by her beauty, her grace, her easy gaiety, and a certain voluble lightness that simulates frankness.

Without anything that approached the prying of curiosity—for she was both too well bred and too little interested to have so felt such a motive, she inquired by what accident the Daltons remained at Baden so late in the season, affected to see some similarity between their cases and her own, asked in the most feeling terms for their father, whose ill-health she deplored, and then took such an interest in "dear Frank," that Kate could not resist showing a portrait of him, which, however humble its claims to art, still conveyed a not unfaithful resemblance of the handsome youth.

While thus hearing about *them*, she was equally communicative about *herself*, and enlisted all the sympathies of the girls as she recounted their escape from the torrent in the Black Forest, and their subsequent refuge in Baden.

Thence she diverged to Sir Stafford's illness, her own life of seclusion and sadness, and, by an easy transition, came round to poor Hans Roëckle and the accident of that morning.

"Do tell me everything about the poor dear thing," said she, pantingly. "They say it is mad."

"No, madam," said Nelly, gravely; "Hans, with many eccentricities of manner, is very far from deficient in good sense or judgment, and is more than ordinarily endowed with right feeling and kindness of heart."

"He is a dwarf, surely?"

"Yes, but in intelligence——"

"Oh, that, of course," interrupted she; "they are rarely deficient in acuteness, but so spiteful, so full of malice. My dear child, there's no trusting them. They never forget an injury, nor even an imaginary slight. There was that creature—what was his name?—that Polish thing, Benywowski, I think—you remember, they baked him in a pie, to amuse Charles II.—well, he never forgave it afterwards, and to the day of his death could never bear the sight of pastry."

"I must except poor Hans from this category," said Nelly, mildly, and with difficulty restraining a smile. "He is amiability itself."

Lady Hester shook her head doubtfully, and went on.

"Their very caprices, my dear, lead them into all kinds of extravagances. For instance, this poor thing, it would seem, is so enamoured of these wooden toys that he makes himself, that he cannot bear to part with them. Now, there's no saying to what excesses he might be carried by this absurd passion. I have read of the most atrocious murders committed under a similar fanaticism."

"I assure you, madam, there need be no fear of such in the present instance. In the first case, Hans is too good; in the second, the objects are too valueless."

"Very true, so they are; but he doesn't think them so, you know."

"Nay, my lady; nor would you either, were you to regard them with attention," broke in Kate, whose cheek was now one glow of scarlet. "Even this, half finished as it is, may lay claim to merit." And as she spoke, she

removed a napkin from a little statue, before which she held the candle.

"For shame, Kate, dearest Kate!" cried Nelly, standing up in bashful discomfiture.

"It is a statuette of poor Frank, madam," continued Kate, who, totally regardless of her sister's interruption, now exhibited the figure nearer. "You see him just as he left us, his knapsack on his shoulder, his sword fastened across it, his little cap on one side of his head, and that happy smile upon his lips. Poor dear fellow! how sad a heart it covered!"

"And was this *his* work?" asked Lady Hester, in astonishment.

"No, madam; my sister Nelly was the artist of this, as of all the others. Unaided and untaught, her own ingenuity alone suggesting the means, as her imagination supplied the conception——"

"Kate! dear, dear Kate!" said Ellen, with a voice of almost rebuke. "You forget how unworthy these poor efforts are of such high-sounding epithets." Then, turning to Lady Hester, she continued, "Were it to ears less charitable than yours, madam, these foolish words were spoken, I should fear the criticism our presumption would seem to call forth. But you will not think harshly of us for ignorance."

"But this figure is admirable; the attitude is graceful; the character of the head, the features, are in good keeping. I know, of course, nothing of the resemblance to your brother, but, as a work of art, I am competent to say it has high merit. Do tell me how the thought of doing these things first occurred to you."

"I learned drawing as a child, madam, and was always fond of it," said Ellen, with a degree of constraint that seemed as if the question were painful to answer.

"Yes, and so have I spent months—ay, I believe I might say years—at the easel, copying every Giorgione at Venice and every Vandyk at Genoa, and yet such a thought never suggested itself to *me*."

"I am happy to think so, madam," was the low response.

"Why so? how do you mean?" asked Lady Hester, eagerly.

"That the motive in my case never could have been yours, madam."

"And what was the motive?"

"Poverty, madam. The word is not a pleasant word to syllable, but it is even better than any attempt at disguise. These trifles, while beguiling many a dreary hour, have helped us through a season of more than usual difficulty."

"Yes, madam," broke in Kate. "You are aware that papa's property is in Ireland, and for some years back it has been totally unproductive."

"How very sad—how dreadful!" exclaimed Lady Hester. But whether the expressions referred to the condition of the Daltons, or of Ireland, it is not quite clear.

"I doubt, madam, if I should have ventured on the confession," said Ellen, with a voice of calm firmness, "were it not for the opportunity it offers of bearing testimony to the kindness of our poor friend yonder, Hans Roëckle. These efforts of mine have met such favour in his eyes that he accepts them all, taking them as rapidly as they are finished, and, I need not say, treating me with a generosity that would become a more exalted patron and a better artist."

"It is quite a romance, I declare!" cried Lady Hester. "The Wood Demon and the Maiden. Only he is not in love with you, I hope?"

"I'm not quite sure of that," said Kate, laughing; "at least, when some rivalry of her own wooden images does not intervene."

"Hush! Hans is awaking," said Ellen, as on tiptoe she crossed the room noiselessly, and opened the door of the chamber where the dwarf lay. Lady Hester and Kate now drew near and peeped in. On a low settle—over which an old scarlet saddle-cloth, fringed with tarnished lace, was spread as a quilt—lay Hans Roëckle, his wounded arm supported by a pillow at his side; his dark eyes glistened with the bright glare of fever, and his cheeks were flushed and burning, as his lips moved unceasingly, with a low muttering, which he continued, regardless of the presence of those who now approached his bedside.

"What is it he is saying? Does he complain of pain?" asked Lady Hester.

"I cannot understand him," said Nelly; "for ever since his accident he has spoken in his native dialect—the *patois* of the Bregentzer Wald—of which I am utterly ignorant; still he will reply to me in good German when questioned." Then, stooping down, she asked, "Are you better, Hans?"

Hans looked up steadfastly in her face without speaking; it seemed as if her voice had arrested his wandering faculties, but yet not awakened any intelligence.

"You are thirsty, Hans," said she, gently, as she lifted a cup of water to his lips. He drank greedily, and then passed his hand across his brow, as if trying to dispel some tormenting fancies. After a second or two, he said, "It was in Nuremberg, in the Oden Gasse, it happened. The Ritter von Ottocar stabbed her as she knelt at the cross; and the dwarf, Der Mohrchen, as they called him, tore off his turban to bind up the wound; and what was his reward, maiden?—tell me that! Are ye all so shamed that ye dare not speak it?"

"We know it not, Hans; we never heard of the Ritter nor the Mohrchen before."

"I'll tell you, then. They burned him as a warlock in the Hohen Platz next morning." With a wild burst of savage laughter he closed this speech, which he spoke in good German; but immediately after his thoughts seemed to turn to his old Tyrol haunts and the familiar language of his native land, as he sang, in a low voice, the following words:—

"A Buchsel zu schiessen,
A Stossring zu schlagn,
A Dienal zu Liebn,
Muss a Bue hahn."

"What does he mean? Do tell me," said Lady Hester, whose interest in the scene was more that of curiosity than compassion.

"It is a peasant dialect; but means, that a rifle to shoot with, a weapon to wield, and a maiden to love, are all that a good Tyroler needs in life," said Kate, while Nelly busied herself in arranging the position of the wounded

limb—little offices for which the poor dwarf looked his gratitude silently.

"How wild his looks are!" said Lady Hester. "See how his eyes glance along the walls, as if some objects were moving before them!" And so in reality was it. Hanserl's looks were riveted upon the strange and incongruous assemblage of toys which, either suspended from nails or ranged on shelves, decorated the sides of the chamber. "Ay," said he at last, with a melancholy smile, "thou'lt have to put off all this bravery soon, my pretty damsels, and don the black veil and the hood, for thy master Hans is dying!"

"He is talking to the wax figures," whispered Kate.

"And ye too, my brave hussars, and ye Uhlaners with your floating banners, must lower your lances as ye march in the funeral procession, when Hanserl is dead! Take down the wine-bush from the door, hostess, and kneel reverently, for the bell is ringing; and here comes the priest in his alb, and with the pix before him. Hush! they are chanting his requiem. Ah! yes. Hanserl is away to the far-off land,—

Wo sind die Täge lang genug,
Wo sind die Nächte mild."

"Come away, we do but excite his mind to wanderings," said Ellen: "so long as there is light to see these toys, his fancy endows them all with life and feeling, and his poor brain is never at rest." The sound of voices in the outer room at the same moment caught their attention, and they heard the courier of Lady Hester in deep converse with Mademoiselle Célestine. He, deploring the two hours he had passed in hunting after his mistress through the dark streets of the village; and she, not less eloquently, bewailing the misery of a night spent in that comfortless cabin. "To visit a wretched dwarf, too! *Parbleu!* had it been a rendezvous with some one worth while, but an excursion without an object, *sans émotion même*—it is too bad!"

"Que voulez-vous!" said Monsieur Grégoire, with a shrug of the shoulders; "she is English!"

"Ah! that is no reason for a vulgar caprice, and I, for one, will not endure it longer. I cannot do so. Such things compromise one's self. I'll give warning to-morrow. What would my poor dear mistress, la Marquise, say, if she only knew how *mes petits talents* were employed?"

"Do not be rash, mademoiselle," interposed the courier; "they are rich, very rich, and we are going to Italy too, the real *pays de Cocagne* of our profession."

How far his persuasions might have gone in inducing her to reconsider her determination there is no saying, when they were suddenly interrupted by Lady Hester's appearance.

Her first care was to ascertain that her absence from the hotel had not been remarked—her secret, as she loved to fancy it, remained sacred. Having learned thus much, she listened with a kind of childish pleasure to the courier's version of all his unhappy wanderings in search of her, until he at last descried a light, the only one that shone from any window in the whole village.

As Grégoire had provided himself with a sufficient number of shawls, cloaks, and clogs, and as the storm had now passed over, Lady Hester prepared to take her leave, delighted with her whole night's adventure. There had been excitement enough to make it all she could desire; nor did she well know whether most to admire her heroism during the storm, or the success with which she captivated the two sisters; the courage which planned the expedition, or the grace with which it was executed.

"You'll come and see me, Miss Dalton; mind, I'm always at home. Remember, Miss Kate Dalton, that they must not deny me to *you*," said she, in her most winning of manners. The two girls gave their promise in bashful diffidence, while she continued,—

"You'll say to your papa, too, that Sir Stafford will wait on him whenever he is able to leave the house. Mr. Onslow, indeed, ought to call at once; but he is so odd. Never mind, we shall be great friends; and you'll bring all your little carving tools and your models with you, and work in my room. Your sister her embroidery, or her lace, or her crochet, or whatever it is, or you'll read

German for me, like a dear child—that will be so delightful. I can't understand a word of it, but it sounds so soft, and you'll tell me all it's about—won't you? And then this poor thing must want for nothing."

"Nay, madam, he is in no need of anything but kindness. In a land where such simple habits prevail, Hans Roëckle passes for rich."

"How strange! how very odd! but I remember that poor Prince of Stolzenheimer. Papa used to say that he had six cordons, but only one coat! I believe it was true."

"Hanserl is better off, madam," replied Nelly, smiling; "at least as regards the coats."

"Tell him, then, that I've been to see him, and am so grieved at his accident, but that it was all Colonel Haggerstone's fault—a bit of silly vanity to show how well he could shoot—and I'm certain it just comes of being used to the pistols. I never missed when I fired with Norwood's!"

The utterance of that name seemed to recall her from the discursive babble. She paused, and for a moment or two she was silent. At last, turning to the sisters, she reiterated her hopes of a speedy meeting, and, with a cordial pressure of the hand to each, wished her last good night, and departed.

CHAPTER X.

A FAMILY DISCUSSION.

Long before Lady Hester awoke on the following morning every circumstance of her visit was known to Grounsell. It was the doctor's custom to see Dalton early each day, and before Sir Stafford was stirring, and to chat away an hour or so with the invalid, telling the current news of the time, and cheering his spirits by those little devices which are not among the worst resources of the Materia Medica. With all his knowledge of Lady Hester's character—her caprices, her whims, and her insatiable passion for excitement, he was still astonished beyond measure at this step: not that the false air of benevolence or charity deceived him—he was too old a practitioner in medicine, and had seen far too much of the dark side of human nature, to be easily gulled—but his surprise arose from the novelty of her condescending to know, and even propitiate, the good graces of people whom she usually professed to regard as the least interesting of all classes of mankind. The "reduced lady or gentleman" had only presented themselves to Lady Hester's mind by the medium of an occasional curiously worded advertisement in a morning paper, and were invariably associated with a subsequent police report, where the object of charity was sure to be confronted with half a dozen peers or members of parliament, whose sympathies he had put under contribution, to support a life of infamy or extravagance. "A begging impostor" rang in her mind as a phrase whose ingredient words could not be divorced, and she was thoroughly convinced that imposture and poverty were convertible terms. The very notion of any one having once been well off, and being now in embarrassment, was, to her deeming, most satisfactory evidence of past misconduct and present knavery. Grounsell had

heard her hold forth on this theme more than once, "embroidering the sentiment" with an occasional sly allusion to himself and his own fortunes, so that he had often thought over the difficulty of serving the Daltons with Sir Stafford, by reflecting on the hostility any project would meet with from "my lady," and now accident, or something very like it, had done what all his ingenuity could not succeed in discovering.

The announcement at first rendered him perfectly mute; he heard it without power to make the slightest observation; and it was only at the end of a lengthy description from the two sisters, that he exclaimed, in a kind of half soliloquy, "By Jove, it is so like her, after all!"

"I'm sure of it," said Nelly; "her manner was kindness and gentleness itself. You should have seen the tender way she took poor Hanserl's hand in her own, and how eagerly she asked us to translate for her the few stray words he uttered."

"Of course she did. I could swear to it all, now that my eyes are opened."

"And with what winning grace she spoke!" cried Kate. "How the least phrase came from her lips with a fascination that still haunts me!"

"Just so, just so!" muttered Grounsell.

"How such traits of benevolence ennoble high station!" said Nelly.

"How easy to credit all that one hears of the charms of intercourse, where manner like hers prevails on every side!" cried Kate, enthusiastically.

"How thoughtful in all her kindness!"

"What elegance in every movement!"

"With what inborn courtesy she accepted the little valueless attentions, which were all we could render her!"

"How beautiful she looked, in all the disorder of a dress so unlike her own splendour! I could almost fancy that old straw chair to be a handsome fauteuil since she sat in it."

"How delightful it must be to be admitted to the freedom of daily intercourse with such a person—to live within the atmosphere of such goodness, and such refinement!" And thus they went on ringing the changes upon

every gift and grace, from the genial warmth of her heart, to the snowy whiteness of her dimpled hands; while Grounsell fidgeted in his chair—searched for his handkerchief—his spectacles—his snuff-box, dropped them all in turn, and gathered them up again, in a perfect fever of embarrassment and indecision.

"And you see her every day, doctor?" said Nelly.

"Yes, every day, madam," said he, hastily, and not noticing nor thinking to whom he was replying.

"And is she always as charming, always as fascinating?"

"Pretty much the same, I think," said he, with a grunt.

"How delightful! And always in the same buoyancy of spirits?"

"Very little changed in that respect," said he, with another grunt.

"We have often felt for poor Sir Stafford being taken ill away from his home, and obliged to put up with the miserable resources of a watering-place in winter; but I own, when I think of the companionship of Lady Hester, much of my compassion vanishes."

"He needs it all, then," said Grounsell, as, thrusting his hands into the recesses of his pockets, he sat a perfect picture of struggling embarrassment.

"Are his sufferings so very great?"

Grounsell nodded abruptly, for now he was debating within himself what course to take, for while, on one side, he deemed it a point of honour not to divulge to strangers, as were the Daltons, any of the domestic circumstances of those with whom he lived, he felt, on the other, reluctant to suffer Lady Hester's blandishments to pass for qualities more sterling and praiseworthy.

"She asked the girls to go and see her," said Dalton, now breaking silence for the first time; for although flattered in the main by what he heard of the fine lady's manner towards his daughters, he was not without misgivings that what they interpreted as courtesy might just as probably be called condescension, against which his Irish pride of birth and blood most sturdily rebelled. "She asked them to go and see her, and it was running

in my head if she might not have heard something of the family connection."

"Possibly!" asserted Grounsell, too deep in his own calculations to waste a thought on such a speculation.

"My wife's uncle, Joe Godfrey, married an Englishwoman. The sister was aunt to some rich city banker; and indeed, to tell the truth, his friends in Ireland never thought much of the connection—but you see times are changed. *They* are up now, and *we* are down—the way of the world! It's little I ever thought of claiming relationship with the like o' them!"

"But if it's they who seek us, papa?" whispered Kate.

"Ay, that alters the case, my dear; not but I'd as soon excuse the politeness. Here we are, living in a small way; till matters come round in Ireland, we can't entertain them—not even give them a dinner-party."

"Oh, dearest papa," broke in Nelly, "is not our poverty a blessing if it save us the humiliation of being absurd? Why should we think of such a thing? Why should we, with our straitened means and the habits narrow fortune teaches, presume even to a momentary equality with those so much above us."

"Faith, it's true enough!" cried Dalton, his cheek flushed with anger. "We *are* changed, there's no doubt of it; or it is not a Dalton would say the words you've just said. I never knew before that the best in the land wasn't proud to come under our roof."

"When we had a roof," said Nelly, firmly. "And if these ancestors had possessed a true and a higher pride, mayhap we might still have one. Had they felt shame to participate in schemes of extravagance and costly display —had they withheld encouragement from a ruinous mode of living, we might still be dwellers in our own home and our own country."

Dalton seemed thunderstruck at the boldness of a speech so unlike the gentle character of her who had uttered it. To have attributed any portion of the family calamities to their own misconduct—to have laid the blame of their downfall to any score save that of English legislation, acts of parliament, grand jury laws, failure of the potato crop,

tithes, Terry alts, or smut in the wheat—was a heresy he never, in his gloomiest moments, had imagined, and now he was to hear it from the lips of his own child.

"Nelly—Nelly Dalton," said he; "but why do I call you Dalton? Have you a drop of our blood in your veins at all—or is it the Godfreys you take after? Extravagance—ruinous living—waste—what'll you say next?" He couldn't continue, indignation and anger seemed almost to suffocate him.

"Papa—dearest, kindest papa!" cried Nelly, as the tears burst from her eyes, "be not angry with me, nor suppose that any ungenerous repining against our altered lot finds a place in my heart. God knows that I grieve not for myself; in the humble sphere in which I am placed, I have found true contentment—greater, perhaps, than higher fortunes would have given me; for here my duties are better defined, and my sense of them is clearer. If I feel sorrow, it is for you and my dear sister; for you, papa, who suffer from many a privation, for her, who might well adorn a more exalted station. But for me—the lame Nelly, as children used to call me——" She was not suffered to finish her speech, for already her father had clasped his arms around her, and Kate, in a gush of tears, was sobbing on his shoulder.

"Where's the doctor—what's become of him?" said Dalton, as, recovering from his emotion, he wished to give a different direction to their thoughts.

"He went away half an hour ago, papa," said Kate. He always goes off without saying good-bye, whenever there is a word said about family."

"I noticed that, too, my dear," said Dalton, "and I wouldn't wonder if he came of low people; not but he's a kind creature, and mighty good-hearted."

Nelly could probably have suggested a better reason for the doctor's conduct, but she prudently forbore from again alluding to a theme already too painful.

With the reader's permission, we will now follow him, as, with a gesture of impatience, he abruptly left the room on the very first mention by Dalton of that genealogical tree, in whose branches he loved to perch himself.

"An old fool!" muttered Grounsell, as he passed down

stairs—"an old fool, that no experience will ever make wiser! Well may his native country be a stumbling-block to legislators, if his countrymen be all like him, with his family pride and pretension! Confound him, can't he see that there's no independence for a man in debt, and no true self-respect left for him who can't pay his tailor? For himself there's no help; but the poor girls! he'll be the ruin of *them*. Kate is already a willing listener to his nonsensical diatribes about blood and family; and poor Nelly's spirits will be broken in the hopeless conflict with his folly! Just so, that will be the end of it; he will turn the head of one, and break the heart of the other, and yet, all the while, he firmly believes he is leaving a far better heritage behind him in this empty pride, than if he could bequeath every acre that once belonged to them." Thus soliloquizing, he went on ringing changes over every form of imprudence, waste, vanity, and absurdity, which, by applying to them the simple adjective of "Irish," he fancied were at once intelligible, and needed no other explanation. In this mood he made his entrance into Sir Stafford's chamber, and so full of his own thoughts that the worthy baronet could not fail to notice his preoccupation.

"Eh! Grounsell, what's the matter—another row with my lady, eh?" said he, smiling with his own quiet smile.

"Not to-day. We've not met this morning, and, consequently, the armistice of yesterday is still unbroken! The fatigue of last night has, doubtless, induced her to sleep a little longer, and so I have contrived to arrive at noon without the risk of an apoplexy."

"What fatigue do you allude to?"

"Oh, I forgot—I have a long story for you. What do you suppose her ladyship has been performing now?"

"I've heard all about it," said Sir Stafford, pettishly. "George has given me the whole narrative of that unlucky business. We must take care of the poor fellow, Grounsell, and see that he wants for nothing."

"You're thinking of the pistol-shooting; but that's not her ladyship's last," said the doctor, with a malicious laugh. "It is as a Lady Bountiful she has come out, and made her *début* last night—I am bound to say with infinite

success." And, without further preface, Grounsell related the whole adventure of Lady Hester's visit to the dwarf, omitting nothing of those details we have already laid before the reader, and dilating with all his own skill upon the possible consequences of the step. "I have told you already about these people: of that old fool, the father, with his Irish pride, his Irish pretensions, his poverty, and his insane notions about family. Well, his head—a poor thing in the best of times—is gone clean mad about this visit. And then the girls! good, dear, affectionate children as they are, they're in a kind of paroxysm of ecstasy about her ladyship's style, her beauty, her dress, the charm of her amiability, the fascination of her manner. Their little round of daily duties will henceforth seem a dreary toil, the very offices of their charity will lose all the glow of zeal when deprived of that elegance which refinement can throw over the veriest trifle. Ay! don't smile at it—the fact is a stubborn one. They'd barter the deepest devotion they ever rendered to assuage pain for one trick of that flattery with which my lady captivated them. Will all the poetry of poor Nelly's heart shut out the memory of graces associated with the vanities of fashion? Will all Kate's dutiful affection exalt those household drudgeries in her esteem, the performances of which will henceforth serve to separate her more and more from one her imagination has already enshrined as an idol?"

"You take the matter too seriously to heart, Grounsell," said Sir Stafford, smiling.

"Not a bit of it; I've studied symptoms too long and too carefully not to be ever on the look-out for results. To Lady Hester, this visit is a little episode as easily forgotten as any chance incident of the journey. But what an event is it in the simple story of *their* lives!"

"Well, well, it cannot be helped now; the thing is done, and there's an end of it," said Sir Stafford, pettishly; "and I confess I cannot see the matter as you do, for I have been thinking for two days back about these Daltons, and of some mode of being of service to them, and this very accident may suggest the way. I have been looking over some old letters and papers, and I've no doubt that I have had—unintentionally, of course—a share in the

poor fellow's ruin. Do you know, Grounsell, that this is the very same Peter Dalton who once wrote to me the most insulting letters, and even a defiance to fight a duel, because a distant relative bequeathed to me a certain estate that more naturally should have descended to him. At first, I treated the epistles as unworthy of any serious attention—they were scarcely intelligible, and not distinguished by anything like a show of reason; but when from insult the writer proceeded to menace, I mentioned the affair to my lawyer, and, indeed, gave him permission to take any steps that might be necessary to rid me of so unpleasant a correspondent. I never heard more of the matter; but now, on looking over some papers, I see that the case went hardly with Dalton, for there was a 'rule to show cause,' and an 'attachment,' and I don't know what besides, obtained against him from the King's Bench, and he was actually imprisoned eight months for this very business; so that, besides having succeeded to this poor fellow's property, I have also deprived him of his liberty. Quite enough of hardship to have suffered at the hands of any one man—and that one, not an enemy."

"And would you believe it, Onslow, we have talked over you and your affairs a hundred times together, and yet he has never even alluded to this? One would think that such an event would make an impression upon most men; but, assuredly, he is either the most forgetful or the most generous fellow on earth."

"How very strange! And so you tell me that he remembers my name, and all the circumstances of that singular bequest—for singular it was—from a man whom I never saw since he was a boy."

"He remembers it all. It was the last blow fortune dealt him, and, indeed, he seemed scarcely to require so heavy a stroke to fell him, for, by his own account, he had been struggling on, in debt and difficulty, for many a year, putting off creditors by the plausible plea that a considerable estate must eventually fall in to him. It is quite certain that he believed this himself, but he also maintained a course of expenditure that, were he even in possession of the property, it would have been impossible to keep up. His brother-in-law's parsimony, too, was a constant source

of self-gratulation to him, fancying, as he did, that a considerable sum in Bank stock would be among the benefits of this bequest. To find himself cut off, without even a mention of his name, was, then, to know that he was utterly, irretrievably ruined."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Onslow; "I never suspected the case had been so hard a one. His letters—you shall see them yourself—bore all the evidence of a man more touchy on the score of a point of honour than mindful of a mere money matter. He seemed desirous of imputing to me—who, as I have told you, never saw Mr. Godfrey for above forty years—something like undue influence, and, in fact, of having prejudiced his brother-in-law against him. He dated his angry epistles from a park or a castle—I forget which—and they bore a seal of armorial pretensions such as an archduke might acknowledge. All these signs seemed to me so indicative of fortune and standing, that I set my friend down for a very bloodthirsty Irishman, but assuredly never imagined that poverty had contributed its sting to the injury."

"I can easily conceive all that," said Grounsell. "At this very moment, with want staring him on every side, he'd rather talk of his former style at—confound the barbarous place, I never can remember the name of it—than he'd listen to any suggestion for the future benefit of his children."

"I have been a grievous enemy to him," said Sir Stafford, musingly.

"He reckons the loss at something like six thousand a year," said Grounsell.

"Not the half of it, doctor. The estate, when I succeeded to it, was in a ruinous condition. A pauper and rebellious tenantry holding their tenures on nominal rents, and either living in open defiance of all law, or scheming to evade it by a hundred subterfuges. Matters are somewhat better; but if so, it has cost me largely to make them so. Disabuse his mind, I beg you, of this error. His loss was at least not so heavy as he reckoned."

"Faith, I'll scarcely venture on so very delicate a theme," said Grounsell, dryly. "I'm not quite so sure how he'd take it."

"I see, doctor," said Onslow, laughing, "that his duelling tastes have impressed you with a proper degree of respect. Well, let us think of something more to the purpose than rectifying a mere mistaken opinion. How can we serve him? What can be done for him?"

"Ruined gentlemen, like second-hand uniforms, are generally sent to the colonies," said Grounsell; "but Dalton is scarcely fit for export."

"What if we could get him appointed a magistrate in one of the West India Islands?"

"New rum would finish him the first rainy season."

"Is he fit for a consulship?"

"About as much as for Lord Chancellor. I tell you the man's pride would revolt at anything to which a duty was annexed. Whatever you decide on must be untrammelled by any condition of this kind."

"An annuity, then—some moderate sum sufficient to support them in respectability," said Onslow; "that is the only thing I see for it, and I am quite ready to do my part, which, indeed, is full as much a matter of honour as generosity."

"How will you induce him to accept it?"

"We can manage that, I fancy, with a little contrivance. I'll consult Prichard; he's coming here this very day about these renewals, and he'll find a way of doing it."

"You'll have need of great caution," said Grounsell; "without being naturally suspicious, misfortune has rendered him very sensitive as to anything like a slight. To this hour he is ignorant that his daughter sells those little figures; and although he sees, in a hundred appliances to his comfort, signs of resources of which he knows nothing, he never troubles his head how the money comes."

"What a strange character!"

"Strange indeed. True pride and false pride, manly patience, childish petulance, generosity, selfishness, liberality, meanness, even to the spirits alternating between boy-like levity and downright despair! The whole is such a mixture as I never saw before, and yet I can fancy it is as much the national temperament as that of the individual."

And now Grounsell, launched upon a sea without compass or chart, hurried off to lose himself in vague speculation about questions that have puzzled, and are puzzling, wiser heads than his.

CHAPTER XI.

"A PEEP BETWEEN THE SHUTTERS" AT A NEW CHARACTER.

Not even Mademoiselle Célestine herself, nor the two London footmen now condemned to exhibit their splendid proportions to the untutored gaze of German rustics, could have chafed and fretted under the unhappy detention at Baden with a greater impatience than did George Onslow. A young Guardsman, who often fancied that London, out of season, was a species of Palmyra; who lived but for the life that only one capital affords; who could not credit the fact that people could ride, dress, dine, and drive anywhere else, was lamentably "ill bestowed" among the hills and valleys, the winding glens and dense pine forests of a little corner of Germany.

If he liked the excitement of hard exercise, it was when the pleasure was combined with somewhat of peril, as in a fox-hunt, or heightened by the animation of a contest, in a rowing match. Scenery, too, he cared for, when it came among the incidents of a deer-stalking day in the Highlands. Even walking, if it were a match against time, was positively not distasteful; but to ride, walk, row, or exert himself, for the mere exercise, was in his philosophy only a degree better than a sentence to the treadmill, the slavery being voluntary not serving to exalt the motive.

To a mind thus constituted, the delay at Baden was intolerable. Lady Hester's system of small irritations and

provocations rendered domesticity and home life out of the question. She was never much given to reading at any time, and now books were not to be had; Sydney was so taken up with studying German, that she was quite uncompanionable. Her father was too weak to bear much conversation; and as for Grounsell, George always set him down for a quiz: good-hearted in his way, but a bit of a bore, and too fond of old stories. Had he been a young lady, in such a predicament, he would have kept a journal, a pretty martyrology of himself and his feelings, and eked out his sorrows between Childe Harold and Werther. Had he been an elderly one, he would have written folios by the post, and covered acres of canvas with dogs in worsted, and tigers in Berlin wool. Alas! he had no such resources. Education had supplied him with but one comfort and consolation—a cigar—and so he smoked away incessantly; sometimes as he lounged out of the window, after breakfast, in all the glory of an embroidered velvet cap, and a gorgeous dressing-gown; sometimes as he sauntered in the empty saloon, or the deserted corridors, in the weed-grown garden, in the dishabille of a many-pocketed shooting-jacket and cork-soled shoes; now, as he lounged along the dreary streets, or passed along the little wooden bridge, wondering within himself how much longer a man could resist the temptation that suggested a spring over the balustrade into the dark pool beneath.

He had come abroad partly for Sydney's sake, partly because, having "gone somewhat too fast" in town, an absence had become advisable. But now, as he sauntered about the deserted streets of the little village, not knowing how long the durance might last, without an occupation, without a resource, both his brotherly love and prudence began to fail him, and he wished he had remained behind, and taken the chances, whatever they might be, of his creditors' forbearance. His moneyed embarrassments involved nothing dishonourable; he had done no more than what some score of very well-principled young men have done, and are doing at this very hour—ay, good reader, and will do again, when you and I have gone where all our moralizing will not deceive any more—he had contracted debts, the payment of which must depend upon

others—he had borrowed what no efforts of his own could restore—he had gambled, and lost sums totally disproportionate to his fortune; but, in all these things, he was still within the pale of honourable conduct—at least, so said the code under which he lived, and George believed it.

Sir Stafford, who only learned about the half of his son's liabilities, was thunderstruck at the amount. It was scarcely a year and a half ago that he had paid all George's debts, and they were then no trifle; and now he saw all the old items revived and magnified, as if there was only one beaten road to ruin—and that began at Crocky's, and ended at "the Bench." The very names of the *dramatis personæ* were the same. It was Lazarus Levi lent the money, at sixty per cent. It was another patriarch, called Gideon Masham, discounted the same. A lucky viscount had once more "done the trick" at hazard; and if Cribbiter had not broken down in training, why Madame Pompadour had, and so the same result came about. George Onslow had got what Newmarket men call a "squeeze," and was in for about seven thousand pounds.

Nothing is more remarkable in our English code social, than the ingenuity with which we have contrived to divide ranks and classes of men, making distinctions so subtle, that only long habit and training are able to appreciate. Not alone are the gradations of our nobility accurately defined, but the same distinctions prevail among the "untitled" classes, and even descend to the professional and trading ranks; so that the dealer in one commodity shall take the *pas* of another; and he who purveys the glass of port for your dessert, would be outraged if classed with him who contributed the Stilton! These hair-splittings are very unintelligible to foreigners; but, as we hold to them, the presumption is, that they suit us; and I should not have stopped now to bestow a passing notice on the system, if it were not that we see it, in some cases, pushed to a degree of extreme resembling absurdity, making even of the same career in life a sliding-scale of respectability; as, for instance, when a young gentleman of good expectations and fair fortune has outraged his guardians and his friends by extravagance, he is immediately removed from the Guards, and drafted into the

Infantry of the Line; if he misbehaves there, they usually send him to India; is he incorrigible, he is compelled to remain in some regiment there; or, in cases of inveterate bad habits, he exchanges into the Cape Rifles, and gets his next removal from the knife of a Caffre.

Ancient geographers have decided, we are not aware on what grounds, that there is a place between "H—ll and Connaught." Modern discovery, with more certitude, has shown one between the Guards and the Line—a species of military purgatory, where, after a due expiation of offences, the sinner may return to the paradise of the Household Brigade without ever transgressing the Inferno of a marching regiment. This half-way stage is the "Rifles." So long as a young fashionable falls no lower, he is safe. There is no impugnment of his character—no injury that cannot be repaired. Now, George Onslow had reached so far. He was compelled to exchange into the —th, then quartered in Ireland. It is true he did not join his regiment; his father had interest enough somewhere to obtain a leave of absence for his son, and First Lieutenant Onslow, *vice* Ridgway promoted, was suffered to amuse himself howsoever and wheresoever he pleased.

The "exchange," and the reasons for which it was effected, were both unpleasant subjects of reflection to George; and as he had few others, these continued to haunt him, till at last he fancied that every one was full of the circumstance, each muttering as he passed, "That's Onslow, that was in the Coldstreams." Lady Hester, indeed, did not always leave the matter purely imaginary, but threw out occasional hints about soldiers who never served, except at St. James's or Windsor, and who were kept for the wonderment and admiration of foreign sovereigns when visiting England—just as Suffolk breeders exhibit a "punch," or a Berkshire farmer will show a hog, for the delectation of swine fanciers. Where children show toys, kings show soldiers, and ours are considered very creditable productions of the kind; but Lady Hester averred, with more of truth than she believed, that a man of spirit would prefer a somewhat different career. These currents, coming as they did in season and out of season, did not add to the inducements for keeping the house, and

so George usually left home each day, and rarely returned to it before nightfall.

It is true he might have associated with Haggerstone, who, on being introduced, made the most courteous advances to his intimacy; but George Onslow was bred in a school whose first lesson is a sensitive shrinking from acquaintance, and whose chief characteristic is distrust. Now he either had heard, or fancied he had heard, something about Haggerstone. "The colonel wasn't all right," somehow or other. There was a story about him, or somebody of his set, and, in fact, it was as well to be cautious; and so the young Guardsman, who would have ventured his neck in a steeplechase, or his fortune on a "Derby," exhibited all the deliberative wisdom of a judge as to the formation of a passing acquaintance.

If we have been somewhat prolix in explaining the reasons of the young gentleman's solitude, our excuse is, that he had thereby conveyed, not alone all that we know, but all that is necessary to be known, of his character. He was one of a class so large in the world, that few people could not count some half-dozen, at least, similar amongst their acquaintance; and all of whom would be currently set down as incapables, if it were not that now and then, every ten years or so, one of these well-looking, well-bred, indolent dandies, as if tired of his own weariness, turns out to be either a dashing soldier, with a heart to dare, and a head to devise the boldest achievements, or a politic leader, with resources of knowledge, and a skill in debate, to confront the most polished and practised veteran in "the Commons."

Our own experiences of our own day show that these are no paradoxical speculations. But we must not pursue the theme further; and have only to add, that the reader is not to believe that George Onslow formed one of these brilliant exceptions. Whether the fault lies more in himself or in us, we must not inquire.

If his lonely walks did not suggest any pleasant reveries, the past did not bring any more agreeable tidings. Dry statements from Mr. Orson, his lawyer—every young man about town has his lawyer now-a-days—about the difficulty of arranging his affairs, being the

chief intelligence he received, with, from time to time, a short and pithy epistle from a certain noble creditor, Lord Norwood, who, although having won very large sums from Onslow, never seemed in such pressing difficulty as since his good fortune.

The viscount's style epistolary was neither so marked by originality, nor so worthy of imitation, that it would be worth communicating; but as one of his letters bears slightly upon the interests of our story, we are induced to give it; and being, like all his correspondence, very brief, we will communicate it *in extenso*.

"Oh, Norwood again!" said Onslow, as he looked at the seal, and read the not very legible autograph in the corner. "My noble friend does not give a very long respite;" and biting his lips in some impatience, he opened the paper, and read:—

"Dear Onslow,—Orson has paid me the two thousand, as you ordered, but positively refuses the seventeen hundred and eighty, the Ascot affair, because I cannot give up the original two bills for twelve hundred passed to me for that debt. I told him that they were thrown into the fire—being devilishly tempted to illustrate the process with himself—six months ago, when you gave the renewals; but all won't do, the old prig persists in his demand, to comply with which is clearly impossible, for I have not even preserved the precious ashes of the incremation. I don't doubt but that, legally speaking, and in pettifogging parlance, he is all correct—but between men of honour such strictness is downright absurdity—and, as Dillhurst says, 'something more.' Now, my dear boy, you must write to him—and at once, too—for I'm in a bad book about 'Chanticleer'—who *is* to win, it seems, after all—and say that he is acting in direct opposition to your wishes—as of course he is—that the money must be paid without more chaffing. The delay has already put me to great inconvenience, and I know how you will be provoked at his obstinacy. You've heard, I suppose, that Brentwood is going to marry Lydia Vaughan. She has thirty thousand pounds, which is exactly what Jack lost last winter. Crosbie

says he ought to 'run away from her—after the start—as he carries no weight:' which is somewhat of my own opinion. What any man has to do with a wife now-a-days, with the funds at eighty-two, and a dark horse first favourite for the Oaks, is more than I know. Doncaster has levanted, and the Red-House folk will smart for it. He would back Hayes's lot, and there's nothing can ever set him right again. By the way, Orson hints that if I give him a release, or something of that sort, with respect to the bills, he'd pay the cash; but this is only a dodge to make a case for lawyers' parchments, stamps, and so forth; so I won't stand it. Your writing to him will do the whole thing at once. What a jolly world it would be, old fellow, if the whole race of Orsons were carried off by the cholera, or anything akin! They are the greatest enemies to human peace in existence.

Believe me, yours most faithfully,

"NORWOOD.

"P.S.—I half fancy Baden is empty by this; but if you chance upon a little fellow—Heaven knows to whom he belongs, or whence he comes—called Albert Jekyl, will you tell him that I'll forward the twenty pounds whenever I win the Oaks, or marry Miss Home Greville, or any other similar piece of good fortune. When he lent me the cash, I don't believe he was the owner of as much more in the world; but it suited him to have a viscount in his debt—a devilish bad investment, if he knew but all. The chances, therefore, are, that he has foundered long ago, and you will be spared the trouble of the explanation; but if he survive, say something apologetic, for letter-writing and foreign postage are only making bad worse."

Although, unquestionably, the postscript of this elegant epistle was the part which reflected most severely upon the writer's good feeling and sense of honour, George Onslow was more struck by what related to his own affairs, nor was it till after the lapse of some days that he took the trouble of considering the paragraph, or learning the name

of the individual referred to. Even then all that he could remember was, that he had seen or heard the name "somewhere," and thus, very possibly, the whole matter would have glided from his memory, if accident had not brought up the recollection.

Returning one evening later than usual from his solitary walk, he found that the hotel was closed, the door strongly secured, and all the usual precautions of the night taken, in the belief that the inmates were already safe within doors. In vain he knocked and thundered at the massive panels; the few servants occupied rooms at a distance, and heard nothing of the uproar. He shouted, he screamed, he threw gravel against the windows, and, in his zeal, smashed them too. All was fruitless; nobody stirred, nor could he detect the slightest sign of human presence in the vast and dreary-looking building before him. The prospect was not a pleasant one, and a December night in the open air was by no means desirable; and yet, where should he turn for shelter? The other hotels were all closed and deserted, and even of the private houses not one in twenty was inhabited. Resolving to give himself one chance more for admission, he scaled the paling of the garden, and reached the rear of the hotel; but here all his efforts proved just as profitless as the former, and he was at last about to abandon all hope, when he caught sight of a faint gleam of light issuing from a small window on the first floor. Having failed to attract notice by all his cries and shouts, he determined to reach the window, to which, fortunately, a large vine, attached to the wall, offered an easy access. George was an expert climber, and in less than a minute found himself seated on the window-sill, and gazing into a room by the aperture between the half-closed shutters. His first impression on looking in was that it was a servant's room. The bare, whitewashed walls—the humble, uncurtained bed—three chairs of coarse wood—all strengthened this suspicion, even to the table, covered by a coarse table-cloth, and on which stood a meal—if meal it could be called—an anchorite might have eaten on Friday. A plate of the common brown bread of the country was balanced by a little dish of radishes, next to

which stood a most diminutive piece of Baden cheese, and a capacious decanter of water, a long-wick'd tallow candle throwing its gloomy gleam over the whole. For a moment or two George was unable to detect the owner of this simple repast, as he was engaged in replenishing his fire; but he speedily returned, and took his place at the table, spreading his napkin before him, and surveying the board with an air of self-satisfaction such as a gourmand might bestow upon the most perfect *petit dîner*. In dress, air, and look, he was thoroughly gentlemanlike; a little foppish, perhaps, in the arrangement of his hair, and somewhat too much display in the jewelled ornaments that studded his neckcloth. Even in his attitude, as he sat at the table, there was a certain air of studied elegance that formed a curious contrast with the miserable meal before him. Helping himself to a small portion of cheese, and filling out a goblet of that element which neither cheers nor inebriates, he proceeded to eat his supper. Onslow looked on with a mingled sense of wonder and ridicule, and while half disposed to laugh at the disparity of the entertainment and him who partook of it, there was something in the scene which repressed his scorn and rendered him even an interested spectator of what went forward. The piercing cold of the night at length admonished him that he should provide for his own admission into the hotel; and although nothing was now easier than to make his presence known, yet he felt a natural reluctance at the pain he must occasion to the stranger, whose frugal mode of living and humble interior would be thus so unceremoniously exposed. "The chances are," thought George, "that these privations are only endurable because they are practised in secret, and at no sacrifice of worldly estimation. How can I then—or what right have I to—inflict the torture of an exposure upon this young man, whoever he is?" The conclusion was very rapidly come to, and not less speedily acted upon; for he determined to spend the night, if need be, in the open air, rather than accept an alternative so painful in its consequences. His resolutions had usually not long to await their accomplishment; and, turning his back to the window, and disdaining the slow process by which he had

gained the ascent, he sprang with one leap down to the ground: in doing so, however, his elbow struck the window, and at the same instant that he reached the earth, the shivered fragments of a pane of glass came clattering after him. In a moment the sash was thrown open, and a head appeared above. "I have smashed the window," cried George, in French, "as the only means of being heard. They have locked me out of the hotel, and I don't fancy spending a winter's night in walking the streets of Baden."

"You're an Englishman," said the voice from above, in English.

"Yes; but I don't see what that has to do with the matter," replied Onslow, testily; "even a Laplander might prefer shelter in such a season."

"If you'll have the goodness to come round to the front door," said the voice—one of the very softest and meekest of voices—"I shall have great pleasure in opening it for you." And at the same time the unknown held forth his candle in polite guidance to the other's steps.

"Thanks, thanks; never mind the light. I know the way perfectly," said George, not a little ashamed at the contrast between his own gruffness and the courtesy of the stranger whose window he had broken.

Onslow had barely time to reach the front door of the inn, when it was opened for him, and he saw before him a very dapper little figure, who with a profusion of regrets at not having heard him before—offered his candle, a wax one on this occasion—for George's accommodation. Protesting that the broken pane was not of the slightest inconvenience—that the room was a small dressing closet—that it was not worth a moment's thought, and so forth, he permitted Onslow to escort him to the door of his room, and then wished him a good night. The scene scarcely occupied the time we have taken to relate it, and yet in that very short space George Onslow had opportunity to see that the unknown had all the easy deportment and quiet breeding of one accustomed to good society. There was, perhaps, a little excess of courtesy, at least according to that school of politeness in which Onslow had been taught; but this might be the effect of living abroad,

where such a tone usually prevailed. The urbanity was not exactly cold enough for George's notions. "No matter; he's no snob, that's clear," thought he; "and even if he were, he's done me good service." And with this blending of selfishness and speculation he went to sleep, and slept soundly, too, not harassed by even a thought of him who passed an hour in the effort to repair his broken window, and shivered the rest of the night through from the insufficiency of his skill.

Blessed immunity theirs, who so easily forget the pain they occasion others, and who deem all things trifles that cost themselves no afterthought of regret. Happy the nature that can, without self-repining, spill the wine over Aunt Betty's one "peach-coloured satin," or, in careless mood, pluck the solitary flower of her only geranium. Enviable stoicism that mislays the keepsake of some poor widow, or lames the old curate's cob, the fond companion of many rambles. These, whatever others think, are very enviable traits, and enable the possessors to wear placid countenances, and talk in most meritorious strain on the blessings of equanimity and the excellent fruits of a well-trained mind.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. ALBERT JEKYL.

Onslow's first thought, on awaking the next morning, was of last night's acquaintance, but all the information he could obtain concerning him was that he was an Englishman who had passed the summer in Baden, and during the season knew and was known by every one. The waiter called him, in the usual formulary, "a very nice gentleman;" and seemed by his manner to infer that any further account might be had by—paying for it. Onslow, if he even understood the hint, was not the man to avail himself of it, so he simply ordered him to bring the hotel book, in which the names of all travellers are inscribed, and at once discovered that the proprietor of the humble *entresol*, No. 6, was a Mr. Albert Jekyl, with the ordinary qualification attached to him of "Rentier Anglais." Searching back in the same instructive volume, he found that, on his arrival in June, Mr. Jekyl had occupied a small apartment on the first floor, from which he had subsequently removed to the second; thence to a single room in the third story, and finally settled down in the quiet seclusion of the small chamber where George had first seen him. These were very small materials from which to compile a history, but at least they conveyed one inference, and that a very common one—that the height of Mr. Jekyl's fortune and that of his dwelling observed to each other an inverse proportion, and that, as his *means* went down, *he* went up. If, then, no very valuable contribution to the gentleman's history was contained here, at least the page recorded his name; and George, reopening Norwood's letter, satisfied himself that this was the same confiding individual who had entrusted the noble viscount with a loan of twenty pounds. George now remembered to have seen his card on Lady Hester's table, with inquiry after Sir Stafford. "Poor fellow!" thought he; "another victim of 'trente-

et-un.' They have cleared him out at the tables, and he is either ashamed to write home, or his friends have refused to assist him. And Norwood, too—the heartlessness of putting to contribution a poor young fellow like this!" Onslow thought worse of this than of fifty other sharp things of the noble lord's doing, and of some of which he had been himself the victim.

"I'll call upon him this very morning!" said George, half aloud, and with the tone and air of a man who feels he has said a very generous thing, and expressed a sentiment that he is well aware will expose him to a certain amount of reprobation. "Jekyl, after all, is a right good name. Lady Hester said something about Jekyls that she knew, or was related to. Good style of fellow—he looked a little tigerish, but that comes of the Continent. If he be really presentable, too, my lady will be glad to receive him in her present state of destitution. Norwood's ungracious message was a bore to be sure, but then he need not deliver it—there was no necessity of taking trouble to be disagreeable—or, better again—far better," thought he, and he burst out laughing at the happy notion, "I'll misunderstand his meaning, and pay the money. An excellent thought; for as I am about to book up a heavy sum to his lordship, it's only deducting twenty pounds and handing it to Jekyl, and I'll be sworn he wants it most of us all."

The more Onslow reflected on it, the more delighted was he with this admirable device; and it is but fair to add, that however gratified at the opportunity of doing a kindness, he was even better pleased at the thought of how their acquaintance at the "Grosvenor" and the "Ultras" would laugh at the "sharp viscount's being sold." There was only one man of all Onslow's set on whom he would have liked to practise this jest, and that man was Norwood. Having decided upon this plan, he next thought of the execution of it, and this he determined should be by letter. A short note, conveying Norwood's message and the twenty pounds, would save all explanation, and spare Jekyl any unpleasant feeling the discussion of a private circumstance might occasion.

Onslow's note concluded with his "thanks for Mr.

Jekyl's kindness on the preceding evening," and expressing a wish to know "at what hour Mr. J. would receive a visit from him."

Within a very few minutes after the billet was despatched, a servant announced Mr. Albert Jekyl, and that young gentleman, in the glory of a very magnificent brocade dressing-gown, and a Greek cap, with slippers of black velvet, embroidered in gold, entered the room.

Onslow, himself a distinguished member of that modern school of dandyism whose pride lies in studs and shirt-pins, in watch-chains, rings, and jewelled canes, was struck by the costly elegance of his visitor's toilette. The opal buttons at his wrists; the single diamond, of great size and brilliancy, on his finger; even the massive amber mouthpiece of the splendid meerschaum he carried in his hand, were all evidences of the most expensive tastes. "Could this by possibility be the man he had seen at supper?" was the question he at once asked himself; but there was no time to discuss the point, as Jekyl, in a voice almost girlish in its softness, said,—

"I could not help coming at once to thank you, Mr. Onslow, for your polite note, and say how gratified I feel at making your acquaintance. Maynard often spoke of you to me; and I confess I was twenty times a day tempted to introduce myself."

"Maynard—Sir Horace Maynard!" cried Onslow, with a slight flush—half pleasure, half surprise, for the baronet was the leader of the set George belonged to—a man of great fortune, ancient family, the most successful on the English Turf, and the envy of every young fellow about town. "Do you know Maynard?"

"Oh, very well indeed," lisped Jekyl; "and like him much."

Onslow could not help a stare at the man who, with perfect coolness and such an air of patronage, professed his opinion of the most distinguished fashionable of the day.

"He has a very pretty taste in equipage," continued Jekyl, "but never could attain to the slightest knowledge of a dinner."

Onslow was thunderstruck. Maynard, whose entertainments were the triumph of the Clarendon, thus criticized

by the man he had seen supping like a mouse on a morsel of mouldy cheese!

"Talking of dinners, by the way," said Jeykl, "what became of Merewater?"

"Lord Merewater?—he was in waiting when we left England."

"A very tidy cook he used to have—a Spaniard called José—a perfect hand at all the Provençal dishes. Good creature, Merewater. Don't you think so?"

Onslow muttered a kind of half-assent; and added, "I don't know him." Indeed, the lord in question was reputed as insufferably proud, and as rarely admitting a commoner to the honour of his acquaintance.

"Poor Merewater! I remember playing him such a trick: to this hour he does not know who did it. I stole the *menu* of one of his grand dinners, and gave it to old Lord Bristock's cook—a creature that might have made the messes for an emigrant ship—and such a travestie of an entertainment never was seen. Merewater affected illness, and went away from the table firmly persuaded that the whole was got up to affront him."

"I thought the Earl of Bristock lived well and handsomely," said George.

"Down at Brentwood it was very well—one was in the country—and grouse and woodcocks, and salmon and pheasants, came all naturally and seasonably; besides, he really had some very remarkable Burgundy; and, though few people will drink it now-a-days, Chambertin *is* a Christmas wine."

The cheese and the decanter of water were uppermost in George's mind, but he said nothing, suffering his companion to run on, which he did, over a wide expanse of titled and distinguished families, with all of whom he appeared to have lived on the closest terms of intimacy. Certainly of those Onslow himself knew, Jekyl related twenty little traits and tokens that showed he was speaking with true knowledge of the parties. Unlike Haggerstone, he rarely, if ever, alluded to any of those darker topics which form the staple of scandal. A very gentle ridicule of some slight eccentricity, a passing quiz of some peculiarity in dress, voice, or manner, was about the extent

of Jekyl's criticism, which on no occasion betrayed any malice. Even the oddities that he portrayed were usually done by some passing bit of mimicry of the individual in question. These he threw into the dialogue of his story without halt or impediment, and which, being done with great tact, great command of face, and a most thorough appreciation of humour, were very amusing little talents, and contributed largely to his social success. Onslow laughed heartily at many of the imitations, and thus recognized characters that were introduced into a narrative without the trouble of announcing them.

"You've heard, perhaps, the series of mishaps which compelled us to take refuge here," said George, leading the way to what he supposed would induce an equal degree of communicativeness on the other side.

"Oh! yes, the landlord told me of your disasters."

"After all, I believe the very worst of them was coming to this place in such a season."

"It is certainly seeing it *en papillote*," said Jekyl, smiling; "and you, perhaps, are not an admirer of beauty unadorned."

"Say, rather, of Nature at her ugliest—for whatever it may be in summer, with foliage, and clear streams, flowers, smart folk airing and driving about, equipage, music, movement, and merry voices—now, it is really too dismal. Pray, how do you get through the day?"

Jekyl smiled one of his quiet, equivocal smiles, and slightly raised his shoulders without speaking.

"Do you shoot?"

"No," said he.

"But why do I ask?—there's nothing to shoot. You ride, then?"

"No."

"Cigars will do a great deal; but, confound it, there must be a large share of the day very heavy on your hands, even with a reasonable allowance for reading and writing."

"Seldom do either!" said Jekyl, with his usual imperturbed manner.

"You haven't surely got up a flirtation with some '*Fräulein* with yellow hair'?"

"I cannot lay claim to such good fortune. I really do nothing. I have not even the usual English resource of a terrier to jump over my stick, nor was I early enough initiated into the mystery of brandy-and-water—in fact, a less occupied individual cannot well be imagined; but somehow—you'll smile if I say—I am not bored."

"It would be very ungenerous, then, to conceal your secret," cried Onslow, "for assuredly the art of killing time here, without killing one's self, is worth knowing."

"The misfortune is, I cannot communicate it; that is, even giving me credit for possessing one, my skill is like that of some great medical practitioner, who has learnt to look on disease with such practised eyes, that the appropriate remedy rises as it were instinctively to his mind,—he knows not how or why,—and who dies, without being able to transmit the knowledge to a successor. I have, somewhat in the same way, become an accomplished idler; and with such success, that the dreariest day of rain that ever darkened the dirty windows of a village inn, the most scorching dog-day that ever emptied the streets of an Italian city, and sent all the inhabitants to their siesta, never hipped me. I have spent a month with perfect satisfaction in quarantine, and bobbed for three weeks in a calm at sea, with no other inconvenience than the moans of my fellow-passengers. There's no secret in it, Mr. Onslow; or, if there be, it lies in this pretty discovery, that we are always bored by our habit of throwing ourselves on the resources of somebody else, who, in his turn, looks out for another, and so on. Now, a man in a fever never dreams of cooling his hand by laying it on another patient's cheek; yet this is what we do. To be thoroughly bored, you must associate yourself with some half-dozen tired, weary, dyspeptic twaddles, and make up a joint-stock bank of your several incapacities, learn to growl in chorus, and you'll be able to go home and practise it as a solo."

"And have you been completely alone here of late?" said George, who began to fear that the sermon on ennui was not unaccompanied by a taste of the evil.

"Occasionally I've chatted for half an hour with two gentlemen who reside here—a Colonel Haggerstone——"

"By the way, who is he?" broke in Onslow, eagerly.

"He has been traced back to Madras, but the most searching inquiries have failed to elicit anything further."

"Is he the man they called Arlington's Colonel Haggerstone?"

Jekyl nodded; but with an air that seemed to say, he would not enter more deeply into the subject.

"And your other companion—who is he?"

"Peter Dalton, of—I am ashamed to say—I forget where," said Jekyl; who, at once assuming Dalton's bloated look, in a well-feigned Irish accent, went on: "a descendant of as ancient and as honourable a familee as any in the three kingdoms, and if a little down in the world—bad luck to them that done it!—just as ready as ever he was to enjoy agreeable society and the ganial flow of soul."

"He's the better of the two, I take it," said Onslow.

"More interesting, certainly—just as a ruined château is a more picturesque object than a new police-station, or a cut-stone penitentiary. There's another feature also which ought to give him the preference. I have seen two very pretty faces from time to time as I have passed the windows, and which I conjecture to belong to his daughters."

"Have you not made their acquaintance?" asked Onslow, in some surprise.

"I grieve to say I have not," sighed Jekyl, softly.

"Why, the matter should not be very difficult, one might opine, in such a place, at such a time, and with——"

He hesitated, and Jekyl added,—

"With such a papa, you were about to say. Well, that is precisely the difficulty. Had my excellent friend, Peter, been a native of any other country, I flatter myself I should have known how to make my advances; but with these dear Irish their very accessibility is a difficulty of no common order. Assume an air of deference and respect, and they'll set you down for a cold formalist, with whom they can have nothing in common. Try the opposite line, and affect the free and easy, and the chances are that you have a duel to fight before you know you have offended. I confess that I have made several small advances, and

thrown out repeated little hints about loneliness, and long evenings, and so forth; and although he has concurred with me in every word, yet his practice has never followed his precept. But I don't despair. What say you, if we attack the fortress as allies? I have a notion we should succeed?"

"With all my heart. What's your plan?"

"At this moment I have formed none, nor is there need of any. Let us go out, like the knight-errants of old, in search of adventures, and see if they will not befall us. The first step will be to make Dalton's acquaintance. Now, he always takes his walk in bad weather in the great Saal below; should he not make his appearance there to-day, as he has already absented himself for some days, I'll call to inquire after him at his own house. You'll accompany me. The rest we'll leave to fortune."

Although Onslow could not see that this step could lead to anything beyond a civil reply to a civil demand, he assented readily, and promised to meet his companion at four o'clock the same evening. As for Jekyl, he took a very different view of the whole transaction, for he knew that while to him there might be considerable difficulty in establishing any footing with the Daltons, the son of the wealthy baronet would be, in all likelihood, very differently looked on. In presenting *him*, thought he, I shall have become the friend of the family at once. It had often before been his fortune in life to have made valuable acquaintances in this manner; and although the poor Daltons were very unlikely to figure in the category of profitable friends, they would at least afford an agreeable resource against the dulness of wintry evenings, and prevent what he himself called the "demoralization" of absence from female society. Lastly, the scheme promised to establish a close intimacy between Onslow and himself; and here was a benefit worth all the others.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUSPICIOUS VISITOR.

How far were the Daltons from suspecting that they were the subject of so much and such varied solicitude, and that, while Lady Hester was fancying to herself all the fashionable beauties whom Kate would eclipse in loveliness, and what an effect charms like hers would produce on society, Sir Stafford was busily concerting with his lawyer the means of effectually benefiting them; and George Onslow—for want of better—speculated, as he smoked, on "the kind of people" they would prove, and wondered whether the scheme were worth the light trouble it was to cost him. Little did they know of all this—little imagine that outside of their humble roof there lived one—save "dear Frank"—whose thoughts included them. "The purple and fine linen" category of this world cannot appreciate the force of this want of sympathy! They, whose slightest griefs and least afflictions in life are always certain of the consolations of friends, and the even more bland solace of a fashionable physician—whose woes are re-echoed by the *Morning Post*, and whose sorrows are mourned in *Court Journals*—cannot frame to themselves the sense of isolation which narrow fortune impresses. "Poverty," says a classical authority, "has no heavier evil than that it makes men ridiculous." But this wound to self-love, deep and poignant though it be, is light in comparison with the crushing sense of isolation—that abstraction from sympathy in which poor men live!

The Daltons were seated around Hanserl's bed, silently ministering to the sick man, and watching with deep and anxious interest the laboured respiration and convulsive twitches of his fever. The wild and rapid utterance of his lips, and the strange fancies they syllabled, often ex-

citing him to laughter, only deepened the gravity of their countenances, and cast over the glances they interchanged a tinge of sadder meaning.

"He couldn't have better luck," muttered Dalton, sorrowfully; "just from being a friend to us! If he had never seen nor heard of us, maybe 'tis happy and healthy he'd be to-day!"

"Nay, nay, papa," said Nelly, gently; "this is to speak too gloomily; nor is it good for us to throw on fortune the burden that we each should bear patiently."

"Don't tell me that there is not such a thing as luck!" replied Dalton, in a tone of irritation. "I know well whether there is or no! For five-and-thirty years whatever I put my hand to in life turned out badly. It was the same whether I did anything on the spur of the moment, or thought over it for weeks. If I wished a thing, that was reason enough for it to come out wrong!"

"And even were it all as you fancy, papa dearest," said Nelly, as she fondly drew her arm round him, "is it nothing that these reverses have found you strong of heart, and high of courage, to bear them? Over and over again have you told me that the great charm of field sports lay in the sense of fatigue bravely endured, and peril boldly confronted—that, devoid of these, they were unworthy of men. Is there not a greater glory, then, in stemming the tide of adverse fortune; and is it not a higher victory that carries you triumphant over the real trials of life—kind of heart, trustful, and generous, as in the best days of your prosperity, and with a more gentle and forbearing spirit than prosperity ever taught?"

"That's nothing against what I was saying," said Dalton, but with a more subdued face. "There's poor little Hans, and till a couple of days ago he never knew what it was to be unlucky. As he told us himself, his life was a fairy tale."

"True," interposed Nelly; "and happy as it was, and blameless and guileless he who led it, mark how many a gloomy thought—what dark distressing fancies hover round his brain, and shadow his sick-bed! No, no! the sorrows of this world are more equally distributed than

we think for, and he who seems to have fewest is oftentimes but he who best conceals them!"

Her voice shook, and became weaker as she spoke; and the last few words were barely audible. Dalton did not notice her emotion; but Kate's looks were bent upon her with an expression of fond and affectionate meaning.

"There's somebody at the door," whispered Dalton; "see who it is, Kate."

Kate arose, and opening the door softly, beheld old Andy; his shrivelled features and lustreless eyes appearing in a state of unusual excitement.

"What's the matter, Andy?—what is it you want?" said she.

"Is the master here?—where's the master?"

"He's here; what do you want with him?" rejoined she.

"I want himself," said he, as with his palsied hand he motioned to Dalton to come out.

"What is it, you old fool?" said Dalton, impatiently, as he arose and followed him outside of the room.

"There's one of them again!" said Andy, putting his mouth to Dalton's ear, and whispering in deep confidence.

"One of what?—one of whom?"

"He's upstairs," muttered Andy.

"Who's upstairs?—who is he?" cried Dalton, angrily.

"Didn't I know him the minit I seen him! Ayeh! Ould as I am, my eyes isn't that dim yet."

"God give me patience with you!" said Dalton; and, to judge from his face, he was not entreating a vain blessing. "Tell me, I say, what do you mean, or who is it is upstairs?"

Andy put his lips once more to the other's ear, and whispered, "An attorney!"

"An attorney!" echoed Dalton.

"Iss!" said Andy, with a significant nod.

"And how do you know he's an attorney?"

"I seen him!" replied the other, with a grin; "and I locked the door on him."

"What for?"

"What for!—what for, is it? Oh! murther, murther!" whined the old creature, who in this unhappy question

thought he read the evidence of his poor master s wreck of intellect. It was indeed no slight shock to him to hear that Peter Dalton had grown callous to danger, and could listen to the terrible word he had uttered without a sign of emotion.

"I seen the papers with a red string round 'em," said Andy, as though by this incidental trait he might be able to realize all the menaced danger.

"Sirrah, ye're an old fool!" said Dalton, angrily, and, jerking the key from his trembling fingers, he pushed past him, and ascended the stairs.

If Dalton's impatience had been excited by the old man's absurd terrors and foolish warnings, his own heart was not devoid of a certain vague dread, as he slowly wended his way upwards. It was true he did not partake of old Andy's fear of the dread official of the law. Andy, who forgetting time and place, not knowing that they were in another land, where the King's writ never ran, saw in the terrible apparition the shadows of coming misfortune. Every calamity of his master's house had been heralded by such a visit, and he could as soon have disconnected the banshee with a sudden death, as the sight of an attorney with an approaching disaster.

It is true, Dalton did not go this far; but still old impressions were not so easily effaced. And as the liberated captive is said to tremble at the clanking of a chain, so his heart responded to the fear that memory called up of past troubles and misfortunes.

"What can he want with me, now?" muttered he, as he stopped to take breath. "They've left me nothing but life, and they can't take *that*. It's not that I'd care a great deal if they did! Maybe, it's more bother about them titles; but I'll not trouble my head about them. I sold the land, and I spent the money; ay, and what's more, I spent it at home among my own people, like a gentleman! and if I'm an absentee, it's not my fault. I suppose he couldn't arrest me!" said he, after a pause. "But, God knows! they're making new laws every day, and it's hard to say if they'll let a man have peace or ease in any quarter of the world before long. Well, well! there's no use guessing. I have nothing to sell—nothing to lose; I

suppose they don't make it a hanging matter, even for an Irishman to live a trifle too fast." And with this piece of reassuring comfort, he pulled up his cravat, threw back the breast of his coat, and prepared to confront the enemy bravely.

Although Dalton made some noise in unlocking the door, and not less in crossing the little passage that led to the sitting-room, his entrance was unperceived by the stranger, who was busily engaged in examining a half-finished group by Nelly. It represented an old soldier, whose eyes were covered by a bandage, seated beside a well, while a little drummer-boy read to him the bulletin of a great victory. She had destined the work for a present to Frank, and had put forth all her genius in its composition. The glowing enthusiasm of the blind veteran—his half-opened lips—his attitude of eagerness as he drank in the words, were finely contrasted with the childlike simplicity of the boy, more intent as it seemed in spelling out the lines than following the signification.

If the stranger was not a finished connoisseur, he was certainly not ignorant of art, and was deep in its contemplation when Dalton accosted him.

"I beg pardon—Mr. Dalton, I presume—really this clever composition has made me forget myself totally. May I ask, is it the work of a native artist?"

"It was done in this place, sir," replied Dalton, whose pride in his daughter's skill was overlaid by a less worthy feeling—shame that a Dalton should condescend to such an occupation.

"I have seen very inferior productions highly prized and praised, and if I am not indiscreet——"

"To prevent any risk of that kind," observed Dalton, interrupting him, "I'll take the liberty of asking your name, and the object of this visit."

"Prichard, sir; of the firm of Prichard and Harding, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields," replied the other, whose voice and manner at once assumed a business-like tone.

"I never heard the names before," said Dalton, motioning to a chair. The stranger seated himself, and, placing a large roll of papers before him on the table, proceeded to untie and arrange them most methodically, and with

the air of a man too deeply impressed with the importance of his occupation to waste a thought upon the astonishment of a bystander.

"Prichard and Harding are mighty cool kind of gentlemen," thought Dalton, as he took his seat at the opposite side of the table, trying, but not with any remarkable success, to look as much at ease as his visitor.

"Copy of deed—draft of instructions—bill of sale of stock—no, here it is! This is what we want," muttered Prichard, half aloud. "I believe that letter, sir, is in your handwriting?"

Dalton put on his spectacles and looked at the document for a few seconds, during which his countenance gradually appeared to light up with an expression of joyful meaning, for his eye glistened, and a red flush suffused his cheek.

"It is, sir—that's mine, every word of it; and, what's more, I'm as ready to stand to it to-day as the hour I wrote it."

Mr. Prichard, scarcely noticing the reply, was again deep in his researches; but the object of them must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EMBARRASSING QUESTION.

How very seldom it is that a man looks at a letter he has written some twenty years or so before, and peruses it with any degree of satisfaction. No matter how pleasurable the theme, or how full of interest at the time, years have made such changes in circumstances, have so altered his relations with the world—dispelled illusions here, created new prospects there—that the chances are he can feel nothing but astonishment for what once were his opinions, and a strange sense of misgiving that he ever could have so expressed himself.

Rare as this pleasure is, we left Mr. Dalton in the fullest enjoyment of it, in our last chapter, and, as he read and re-read his autograph, every feature of his face showed the enjoyment it yielded him.

"My own writing, sure enough! I wish I never put my hand to paper in a worse cause! Isn't it strange," he muttered, "how a man's heart will outlive his fingers? I couldn't write now as well as I used then, but I can feel just the same. There's the very words I said." And with this he read, half aloud, from the paper—"'But if you'll consent to send lawyers and attorneys to the devil, and let the matter be settled between us, like two gentlemen, Peter Dalton will meet you, when, where, and how you like, and take the satisfaction as a full release of every claim and demand he makes on you.' Just so! and a fairer offer never was made, but I grieve to say it wasn't met in the same spirit."

"When you wrote that letter, Mr. Dalton," said Prichard, not looking up from the papers before him, "you were doubtless suffering under the impression of a wrong at the hands of Sir Stafford Onslow."

"Faith, I believe you. The loss of a fine estate wasn't a trifle, whatever you may think it!"

"The question ought rather to be, what right had you to attribute that loss to *him?*"

"What right is it? All the right in the world. Who got the property? Answer me that. Wasn't it he came in as a sole legatee? But what am I talking about? Sure the thing is done and ended, and what more does he want?"

"I'm just coming to that very point, sir," said Prichard. "Sir Stafford's attention having been accidentally called to this transaction, he perceives that he has unwittingly done you a great injustice, and that there is one matter, at least, on which he is bound, even for his own satisfaction——"

"Satisfaction, is it?" broke in Dalton, catching at the only word that struck his ear with a distinct signification. "Better late than never, and it's proud I am to oblige him. Not but there's people would tell you that the time's gone by, and all that sort of thing, but them was never my sentiments. 'Never a bad time for a good deed,' my poor father used to say, and you may tell him that I'll think the better of his countrymen to the day of my death for what he's going to do now."

Prichard laid down the paper he was reading, and stared at the speaker in mute amazement.

"You're his friend, I perceive," said Dalton.

"Sir Stafford is kind enough to consider me in that light."

"Faith! the kindness is all the other way," rejoined Dalton, laughing; "at least, in this country, for the seconds are just as guilty as the principals, and have no fun for their money. But, sure, we can cross over to Landau; they tell me it's Barbaria there, over the Rhine."

"Bavaria, perhaps?" interposed the other.

"Yes, that's what I said. We can be over the frontier in two hours. There's every conveniency in life," said he, rubbing his hands in high glee.

"Our business, I trust, sir, can be all arranged here, and without much delay either."

"Just as you like; I'm not fond of moving since my knee was bad, and I'm agreeable to anything."

"You seem to contemplate a hostile meeting, sir, if I

understand you aright," said Prichard, slowly; "but if you had been kind enough to hear me out, you'd have seen that nothing was further from my friend's thoughts or my own."

"Oh, murther!" groaned Dalton, as he sank down into a chair.

"We never entertained any such intention."

"No duel?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Sure, I heard you say satisfaction. I'll take my oath you said satisfaction."

"I hope sincerely, sir, that the word may bear a peaceful signification."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried Dalton, as, clasping his hands on his knees, he sat, a perfect type of disappointed hope, and totally inattentive to a very eloquent explanation that Prichard was pouring forth. "You see, now, sir, I trust," cried the latter, triumphantly, "that if my friend's intentions are not precisely what you looked for, they are not less inspired by an anxious desire to cultivate your friendship and obtain your good opinion."

"I wasn't listening to a word you were saying," said Dalton, with a sincerity that would have made many men smile; but Mr. Prichard never laughed, or only when the joke was uttered by a silk gown, or the initiative given by the bench itself.

"I was endeavouring, sir, to convey," said he again, and with infinite patience, "that, by a clause of the late Mr. Godfrey's will, the suggestion was made to the effect that, if Sir Stafford Onslow should deem it fitting and suitable, the testator would not be averse to an annuity of from one hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds per annum being settled on Mr. Peter Dalton for the term of his life. This clause has now been brought under Sir Stafford's notice for the first time, as he never, in fact, saw the will before. The document was lodged in our hands; and as certain proceedings, of which the letter you have just acknowledged forms a part, at that period placed you in a peculiar position of hostility to Sir Stafford, we, as his legal advisers, did not take any remarkable pains to impress this recommendation on his memory."

"Go on; I'm listening to you," said Dalton.

"Well, sir, Sir Stafford is now desirous of complying with this injunction, the terms of which he reads as more obligatory upon him than his legal friends would be willing to substantiate. In fact, he makes the matter a question of feeling, and not of law; and this, of course, is a point wherein we have no right to interpose an opinion. Something like ten years have elapsed since Mr. Godfrey's death, and taking the sum at two hundred pounds, with interest at five per cent., a balance of above three thousand two hundred will now be at your disposal, together with the annuity on your life; and to arrange the payment of these moneys, and take measures for their future disbursement, I have the honour to present myself before you. As for these letters, they are your own; and Sir Stafford, in restoring them, desires to efface all memory of the transaction they referred to, and to assure you that, when circumstances enable him to meet you, it may be on terms of perfect cordiality and friendship."

"Upon my soul and conscience I don't understand a word of it all!" said Dalton, whose bewildered looks gave a perfect concurrence to the speech. "Is it that I have a right to all the money?"

"Exactly, sir; Sir Stafford feels that he is simply carrying out the wishes of your relative, Mr. Godfrey——"

"But this has nothing to do with the little difference between Sir Stafford and myself? I mean, it leaves us just where we were before."

"Sir Stafford hopes that henceforth a better understanding will subsist between you and himself; and that you, seeing how blameless he has been in the whole history of your losses, will receive this act as an evidence of his desire to cultivate your friendship."

"And this two hundred a year?"

"Is Mr. Godfrey's bequest."

"But depending on Sir Stafford to pay or not, as he likes."

"I have already told you, sir, that he conceives he has no option in the matter; and that the mere expression of a desire on Mr. Godfrey's part becomes to him a direct injunction."

"Faith! he was mighty long in finding it out, then," said Dalton, laughing.

"I believe I have explained myself on that head," replied Prichard; "but I am quite ready to go over the matter again."

"God forbid! my head is 'moidered' enough already, not to make it worse! Explanations, as they call them, always puzzle me more; but if you'd go over the subject to my daughter Nelly, her brain is as clear as the Lord Chancellor's. I'll just call her up here, for, to tell you the truth, I never see my way right in anything till Nelly makes it out for me."

Mr. Prichard was probably not grieved at the prospect of a more intelligent listener, and readily assented to the proposition, in furtherance of which Dalton left the room to seek his daughter.

On descending to the little chamber where he had left the two girls, in waiting beside the dwarf's sick-bed, he now discovered that they had gone, and that old Andy had replaced them; a change which, to judge from Hanserl's excited looks and wild utterance, was not by any means to his taste.

"Was machst du hier?" cried he, sternly, to the old man.

"Whisht! alannah! Take a sleep, acushla!" whined old Andy, as, under the delusion that it was beside an infant his watch was established, he tried to rock the settle-bed like a cradle, and then croned away in a cracked voice one of his own native ditties:—

"I saw a man weeping and makin' sad moan,
He was crying and grievin',
For he knew their deceivin',
An' rockin' a cradle for a child not his own."

"Was für katzen jammer! What for cats' music mak'st thou there?"

"Where's the girls, Andy?" whispered Dalton in the old man's ear.

"They're gone," muttered he.

"Gone where?—where did they go?"

"Fort mit ihm. Away with him. Leave him not stay.

Mein head is heavy, and mein brain turn round!" screamed Hanserl.

"Will ye tell me where they're gone, I say?" cried Dalton, angrily.

"Hushoo! husho!" sang out the old man, as he fancied he was composing his charge to sleep; and then made signs to Dalton to be still, and not awaken him.

With an angry muttering, Dalton turned away and left the chamber, totally regardless of Hanserl's entreaties to take Andy along with him.

"You're just good company for each other!" said he, sulkily, to himself. "But where's these girls, I wonder?"

"Oh, papa, I have found you at last!" cried Kate, as, bounding down the stairs half a dozen steps at a time, she threw her arm round him. "She's here! she's upstairs with us; and so delightful, and so kind, and so beautiful. I never believed any one could be so charming."

"And who is she, when she's at home?" said Dalton, half sulkily.

"Lady Hester, of course, papa. She came while we were sitting with Hanserl—came quite alone to see him and us; and when she had talked to him for a while, so kindly and so sweetly, about his wound, and his fever, and his home in the Tyrol, and his mother, and everything, she turned to Nelly and said, 'Now, my dears, for a little conversation with yourselves. Where shall we go to be quite alone and uninterrupted?' We didn't know what to say, papa; for we knew that you and the strange gentleman were busy in the sitting-room, and while I was thinking what excuse to make, Nelly told her that our only room was occupied. 'Oh, I don't care for that in the least,' said she; 'let us shut ourselves up in your dressing-room.' Our dressing-room! I could have laughed and cried at the same moment she said it; but Nelly said that we had none, and invited her upstairs to her bedroom; and there she is now, papa, sitting on the little bed, and making Nelly tell her everything about who we are, and whence we came, and how we chanced to be living here."

"I wonder Nelly hadn't more sense," said Dalton,

angrily; "not as much as a curtain on the bed, nor a bit of carpet on the floor. What'll she think of us all?"

"Oh, papa, you're quite mistaken; she called it a dear little snuggery; said she envied Nelly so much that lovely view over Eberstein and the Schloss, and said what would she not give to lead our happy and peaceful life, away from that great world she despises so heartily. How sad to think her duties tie her down to a servitude so distasteful and repulsive!"

"Isn't my lady the least taste in life of a humbug, Kitty?" whispered Dalton, as his eyes twinkled with malicious drollery.

"Papa, papa! you cannot mean——"

"No harm if she is, darling. I'm sure the pleasantest, ay, and some of the worthiest, people ever I knew were humbugs; that is, they were always doing their best to be agreeable to the company; and if they strained their consciences a bit, small blame to them for that same."

"Lady Hester is far above such arts, papa; but you shall judge for yourself. Come in now, for she is so anxious to know you."

Kate, as she spoke, had opened the door of the little bedroom, and, drawing her arm within her father's, gently led him forward to where Lady Hester was seated upon the humble settle.

"It's a nice place they showed you into, my lady," said Dalton, after the ceremony of introduction was gone through; "and there was the drawing-room, or the library, and the breakfast-parlour, all ready to receive you."

"We heard that you were engaged with a gentleman on business, papa."

"Well, and if I was, Nelly, transacting a small matter about my estates in Ireland, sure it was in my own study we were."

"I must be permitted to say that I am very grateful for any accident which has given me the privilege of an intimate with my dear young friends," said Lady Hester, in her very sweetest of manners; "and as to the dear little room itself, it is positively charming."

"I wish you'd see Mount Dalton, my lady. There's a window, and it isn't bigger than that there, and you

can see seven baronies out of it and a part of three counties—Killikelly's flour-mills, and the town of Drumcoolaghan in the distance; not to speak of the Shannon winding for miles through as elegant a bog as ever you set eyes upon."

"Indeed!" smiled her ladyship, with a glance of deep interest.

"'Tis truth I'm telling you, my lady," continued he; "and, what's more, 'twas our own, every stick and stone of it. From Crishnamuck to Ballymodereena on one side, and from the chapel at Dooras down to Drumcoolaghan, 'twas the Dalton estate."

"What a princely territory!"

"And why not? Weren't they kings once, or the same as kings. Didn't my grandfather, Pearce, hold a court for life and death in his own parlour? Them was the happy and the good times too," sighed he, plaintively.

"But I trust your late news from Ireland is favourable?"

"Ah! there isn't much to boast about. The old families is dying out fast, and the properties changing hands. A set of English rogues and banker-fellows, that made their money in dirty lanes and alleys——"

A sort of imploring, beseeching anxiety from his daughter Kate here brought Dalton to a dead stop, and he pulled up as suddenly as if on the brink of a precipice.

"Pray, go on, Mr. Dalton," said Lady Hester, with a winning smile; "you cannot think how much you have interested me. You are aware that we really know nothing about poor dear Ireland; and I am so delighted to learn from one so competent to teach."

"I didn't mean any offence, my lady," stammered out Dalton, in confusion. "There's good and bad everywhere; but I wish to the Lord the cotton-spinners wouldn't come among us, and their steam-engines, and their black chimneys, and their big factories; and they say we are not far from that now."

A gentle tap at the door, which communicated with the sitting-room, was heard at this moment, and Dalton exclaimed,—

"Come in!" but, not suffering the interruption to stop the current of his discourse, he was about to resume, when Mr. Prichard's well-powdered head appeared at the door.

"I began to suspect you had forgotten me, Mr. Dalton," said he; but suddenly catching a glimpse of Lady Hester, he stopped to ask pardon for the intrusion.

"Faith, and I just did," said Dalton, laughing; "couldn't you contrive to step in in the morning, and we'll talk that little matter over again?"

"Yes, Prichard; pray don't interrupt us now," said Lady Hester, in a tone of half-peevishness. "I cannot possibly spare you, Mr. Dalton, at this moment;" and the man of law withdrew, with a most respectful obeisance.

"You'll forgive me, won't you?" said she, addressing Dalton, with a glance whose blandishment had often succeeded in a more difficult case.

"And now, papa, we'll adjourn to the drawing-room," said Kate, who somehow continued to notice a hundred deficiencies in the furniture of a little chamber she had often before deemed perfect.

Dalton accordingly offered his arm to Lady Hester, who accepted the courtesy in all form, and the little party moved into the sitting-room; Nelly following, with an expression of sadness in her pale features, very unlike the triumphant glances of her father and sister.

"I'm certain of *your* pardon, Mr. Dalton, and of *yours*, too, my dear child," said Lady Hester, turning towards Kate, as she seated herself on the stiff old sofa, "when I avow that I have come here determined to pass the evening with you. I'm not quite so sure that my dear Miss Dalton's forgiveness will be so readily accorded me. I see that she already looks gravely at the prospect of listening to my fiddle-faddle instead of following out her own charming fancies."

"Oh! how you wrong me, my lady," broke in Nelly, eagerly. "If it were not for my fears of our unfitness—our inability," she stammered, in confusion and shame; and old Dalton broke in,—

"Don't mind her, my lady; we're as well used to

company as any family in the country; but, you see, we don't generally mix with the people one meets abroad; and why should we? God knows who they are. There was chaps here last summer at the tables you wouldn't let into the servants' hall. There was one I seen myself, with an elegant pair of horses, as nice steppers as ever you looked at, and a groom behind with a leather strap round him, and a——"—here Mr. Dalton performed a pantomime, by extending the fingers of his open hand at the side of his head, to represent a cockade—"what d'ye call it—in his hat; and who was he, did you think? 'Billy Rogers,' of Muck; his father was in the canal——"

"In the canal!" exclaimed Lady Hester, in affright.

"Yes, my lady; in the Grand Canal—an inspector at forty pounds a year—the devil a farthin' more; and if you seen the son here, with two pins in his cravat, and a gold chain twisting and turning over his waistcoat, with his hat on one side, and yellow gloves, new every morning, throwing down the 'Naps' at that thieving game they call 'Red and Black,' you'd say he was the Duke of Leinster!"

"Was he so like his Grace?" asked Lady Hester, with a delightful simplicity.

"No; but grander!" replied Dalton, with a wave of his hand.

"It is really, as you remark, very true," resumed her ladyship; "it is quite impossible to venture upon an acquaintance out of England; and I cordially concur in the caution you practise."

"So I'm always telling the girls—'better no company than trumpery!' not that I don't like a bit of sociality as well as ever I did—a snug little party of one's own—people whose mothers and fathers had names—the real old stock of the land. But to be taken up with every chance rapscallion you meet on the cross-roads—to be hand and glove with this, that, and the other—them never was my sentiments."

It is but justice to confess there was less of hypocrisy in the bland smile Lady Hester returned to this speech than might be suspected; for, what between the rapidity of Dalton's utterance, and the peculiar accentuation he gave to certain words, she did not really comprehend one

syllable of what he said. Meanwhile, the two girls sat silent and motionless. Nelly, in all the suffering of shame at the absurdity of her father's tone—the vulgarity of an assumption she had fondly hoped years of poverty might have tamed down, if not obliterated; Kate, in mute admiration of their lovely visitor, of whose graces she never wearied. Nor did Lady Hester make any effort to include them in the conversation; she had come out expressly for one sole object—to captivate Mr. Dalton; and she would suffer nothing to interfere with her project. To this end, she heard his long and tiresome monologues about Irish misery and distress, narrated with an adherence to minute and local details that made the whole incomprehensible; she listened to him with well-feigned interest, in his narratives of the Daltons of times long past, of their riotous and extravagant living, their lawlessness, and their daring; nor did she permit her attention to flag while he recounted scenes and passages of domestic annals, that might almost have filled a page of savage history.

"How sorry you must have felt to leave a country so dear by all its associations and habits," sighed she, as he finished a narrative of more than ordinary horrors.

"Ain't I breaking my heart over it? Ain't I fretting myself to mere skin and bone?" said he, with a glance of condolence over his portly figure. "But what could I do? I was forced to come out here for the education of the children—bother it for education!—but it ruins everybody now-a-days. When I was a boy, reading and writing, with a trifle of figures, was enough for any one. If you could tell what twenty bullocks cost, at two pounds four-and-sixpence a beast, and what was the price of a score of hoggets, at fifteen shillings a head, and wrote your name and address in a good round hand, 'twas seldom you needed more; but now you have to learn everything—ay, sorrow bit, but it's learning the way to do what every one knows by nature; riding, dancing—no, but even walking, I'm told, they teach too! Then there's French you must learn for talking! and Italian to sing!—and German—upon my soul I believe it's to snore in!—and what with music, dancing, and drawing, everybody is brought up like a play-actor."

"There is, as you remark, far too much display in modern education, Mr. Dalton; but you would seem fortunate enough to have avoided the error. A young lady whose genius can accomplish such a work as this——"

"'Tis one of Nelly's, sure enough," said he, looking at the group to which she pointed, but feeling even more shame than pride in the avowal.

The sound of voices—a very unusual noise—from the door without, now broke in upon the conversation, and Andy's cracked treble could be distinctly heard in loud altercation.

"Nelly! Kitty! I say," cried Dalton, "see what's the matter with that old devil. There's something come over him to-day, I think, for he won't be quiet for two minutes together."

Kate accordingly hastened to discover the cause of a tumult in which now the sound of laughter mingled.

As *we*, however, enjoy the prerogative of knowing the facts before they could reach *her*, we may as well inform the reader that Andy, whose intelligence seemed to have been preternaturally awakened by the sight of an attorney, had been struck by seeing two strangers enter the house-door and leisurely ascend the stairs. At such a moment, and with his weak brain filled with its latest impression, the old man at once set them down as bailiffs come to arrest his master. He hobbled after them, therefore, as well as he could, and just reached the landing as Mr. Jekyl, with his friend Onslow, had arrived at the door.

"Mr. Dalton lives here, I believe?" said Jekyl.

"Anan," muttered Andy, who, although he heard the question, affected not to have done so, and made this an excuse for inserting himself between them and the door.

"I was asking if Mr. Dalton lived here!" cried Jekyl, louder, and staring with some astonishment at the old fellow's manœuvre.

"Who said he did, eh?" said Andy, with an effort at fierceness.

"Perhaps it's on the lower story?" asked Onslow.

"Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't, then!" was the answer.

"We wish to see him, my good man," said Jekyl; "or, at least to send a message to him."

"Sure! I know well enough what ye want," said Andy, with a wave of his hand. "Tisn't the first of yer like I seen!"

"And what may that be?" asked Onslow, not a little amused by the blended silliness and shrewdness of the old man's face.

"Ayeh! I know yez well," rejoined he, shaking his head. "Be off, then, and don't provoke the house! Away wid yez, before the servants sees ye."

"This is a rare fellow," said Onslow, who, less interested than his companion about the visit, was quite satisfied to amuse himself with old Andy. "So you'll not even permit us to send our respects, and ask how your master is?"

"I'm certain you'll be more reasonable," simpered Jekyl, as he drew a very weighty-looking purse from his pocket, and, with a considerable degree of ostentation, seemed preparing to open it.

The notion of bribery, and in such a cause, was too much for Andy's feelings; and, with a sudden jerk of his hand, he dashed the purse out of Jekyl's fingers, and scattered the contents all over the landing and stairs. "Ha, ha!" cried he, wildly, "'tis only ha'pence he has, after all!" And the taunt was so far true, that the ground was strewn with kreutzers and other copper coins of the very smallest value.

As for Onslow, the scene was too ludicrous for him any longer to restrain his laughter; and although Jekyl laughed too, and seemed to relish the absurdity of his mistake, as he called it, having put in his pocket a collection of rare and curious coins, his cheek, as he bent to gather them up, was suffused with a deeper flush than the mere act of stooping should occasion. It was precisely at this moment that Kate Dalton made her appearance.

"What is the matter, Andy?" asked she, turning to the old man, who appeared, by his air and attitude, as if determined to guard the doorway.

"Two spalpeens, that want to take the master; that's what it is," said he, in a voice of passion.

Ah! a real gold thread glitters

"Your excellent old servant has much mistaken us, Miss Dalton," said Jekyl, with his most deferential of manners. "My friend, Captain Onslow,"—here he moved his hand towards George, who bowed—"and myself, having planned a day's shooting in the 'Moorg,' have come to request the presence of Mr. Dalton's company."

"Oh, the thievin' villains!" muttered Andy; "that's the way they'll catch him."

Meanwhile Kate, having promised to convey their polite invitation, expressed her fears that her father's health might be unequal to the exertion. Jekyl immediately took issue upon the point, and hoped, and wondered, and fancied, and "flattered himself" so much, that Kate at last discovered she had been drawn into a little discussion, when she simply meant to have returned a brief answer; and while she was hesitating how to put an end to an interview that had already lasted too long, Dalton himself appeared.

"Is it with me these gentlemen have their business?" said he, angrily, while he rudely resisted all Andy's endeavours to hold him back.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Dalton," said Jekyl, warmly, "it is such a pleasure to see you quite restored to health again! Here we are—Captain Onslow, Mr. Dalton—thinking of a little excursion after the woodcocks down the Moorg Thal; and I have been indulging the hope that you'll come along with us."

The very hint of an attention, the merest suggestion that bordered on a civility, struck a chord in old Dalton's nature that moved all his sympathies. It was at once a recognition of himself and his ancestry for generations back. It was a rehabilitation of all the Daltons of Mount Dalton for centuries past; and as he extended a hand to each, and invited them to walk in, he half felt himself at home again, doing the honours of his house, and extending those hospitalities that had brought him to beggary.

"Are you serious about the shooting party?" whispered Onslow to Jekyl, as he walked forward.

"Of course not. It's only a 'Grecian horse,' to get inside the citadel."

"My daughter, Miss Dalton; Mr. Jekyl—Miss Kate Dalton. Your friend's name, I believe, is——

"Captain Onslow."

Lady Hester started at the name, and, rising, at once said,—

"Oh, George, *I* must introduce you to my fair friends. Miss Dalton, this gentleman calls me 'mamma;' or, at least, if he does not, it is from politeness. Captain Onslow—Mr. Dalton. Now, by what fortunate event came you here?"

"Ought I not to ask the same question of your ladyship?" said George, archly.

"If you like; only that, as I asked first——"

"You shall be answered first. Lady Hester Onslow, allow me to present Mr. Albert Jekyl."

"Oh, indeed!" drawled out Lady Hester, as, with her very coldest bow, she surveyed Mr. Jekyl through her glass, and then turned away to finish her conversation with Ellen.

Jekyl was not the man to feel a slight repulse as a defeat; but, at the same time, saw that the present was not the moment to risk an engagement. He saw, besides, that, by engaging Dalton in conversation, he should leave Lady Hester and Onslow at liberty to converse with the two sisters, and, by this act of generosity, entitle himself to gratitude on all sides. And, after all, among the smaller martyrdoms of this life, what self-sacrifice exceeds his who, out of pure philanthropy, devotes himself to the "bore" of the party. Honour to him who can lead the forlorn hope of this stronghold of weariness. Great be his praises who can turn from the seductive smiles of beauty, and the soft voices of youth, and only give eye and ear to the tiresome and uninteresting. High among the achievements of unobtrusive heroism should this claim rank; and if you doubt it, my dear reader, if you feel disposed to hold cheaply such darings, try it—try even for once. Take your place beside that deaf old lady in the light auburn wig, or draw your chair near to that elderly gentleman, whose twinkling grey eyes and tremulous lip bespeak an endless volubility on the score of personal reminiscences. Do this, too, within earshot

of pleasant voices and merry laughter—of that tinkling ripple that tells of conversation flowing lightly on, like a summer stream, clear where shallow, and reflective where deep! Listen to the wearisome bead-roll of family fortunes—the births, deaths, and marriages of those you never saw, and hoped never to see—hear the long narratives of past events, garbled, mistaken, and misstated, with praise and censure ever misapplied, and then, I say, you will feel that, although such actions are not rewarded with red ribbons or blue, they yet demand a moral courage and a perseverance that in wider fields win high distinction.

Albert Jekyl was a proficient in this great art; indeed, his powers developed themselves according to the exigency, so that the more insufferably tiresome his companion, the more seemingly attentive and interested did he become. His features were, in fact, a kind of "bore-ometer," in which, from the liveliness of the expression, you might calculate the stupidity of the tormentor; and the mercury of his nature rose, not fell, under pressure. And so you would have said had you but seen him that evening, as, seated beside Dalton, he heard, for hours long, how Irish gentlemen were ruined and their fortunes squandered. What jolly times they were when men resisted the law and never feared a debt! Not that, while devouring all the "rapparee" experiences of the father, he had no eye for the daughters, and did not see what was passing around him. Ay, that did he, and mark well how Lady Hester attached herself to Kate Dalton, flattered by every sign of her unbought admiration, and delighted with the wondering homage of the artless girl. He watched Onslow, too, turn from the inanimate charms of Nelly's sculptured figures, to gaze upon the long dark lashes and brilliant complexion of her sister. He saw all the little comedy that went on around him, even to poor Nelly's confusion, as she assisted Andy to arrange a tea-table, and, for the first time since their arrival, proceed to make use of that little service of white and gold which, placed on a marble table for show, constitutes the invariable decoration of every humble German drawing-room. He even overheard her, as she left the room, giving Andy

her directions a dozen times over, how he was to procure the tea, and the sugar, and the milk—extravagances she did not syllable without a sigh. He saw and heard everything, and rapidly drew his own inferences, not alone of their poverty, but of their unfitness to struggle with it.

"And yet, I'd wager these people," said he to himself, "are revelling in superfluities; at least, as compared to *me!* But, so it is, the rock that one man ties round his neck, another would make a stepping-stone of!" This satisfactory conclusion gave additional sweetness to the bland smile with which he took his teacup from Nelly's hand, while he pronounced the beverage the very best he had ever tasted out of Moscow. And so we must leave the party.

CHAPTER XV.

CONTRASTS.

"So you think, Grounsell, I may be able to leave this in a day or two?" said Sir Stafford, as, on the day following the events we have just related, he slowly walked up and down his dressing-room.

"By the end of the week, if the weather only continue fine, we may be on the road again."

"I'm glad of it—heartily glad of it! Not that, as regarded myself, it mattered much where I was laid up in dock; but I find that this isolation, instead of drawing the members of my family more closely together, has but served to widen the breach between them. Lady Hester and Sydney rarely meet; George sees neither of them, and rarely comes near me, so that the sooner we go hence the better for all of us."

Grounsell gave a dry nod of assent, without speaking.

"Sydney is very anxious to go and pass some time with her aunt Conway; but I foresee that, if I consent, the difference between Lady Hester and her will then become an irreconcilable quarrel. You don't agree with me, Grounsell?"

"I do not. I never knew the ends of a fractured bone unite by grating them eternally against each other."

"And, as for George, the lounging habits of his service and cigars have steeped him in an indolence from which there is no emerging. I scarcely know what to do with him."

"It's hard enough to decide upon," rejoined Grounsell; "he has some pursuits, but not one ambition."

"He has very fair abilities, certainly," said Sir Stafford, half peevishly.

"Very fair!" nodded Grounsell.

"A good memory—a quick apprehension."

"He has one immense deficiency, for which nothing can compensate," said the doctor, solemnly.

"Application—industry?"

"No, with *his* opportunities a great deal is often acquired with comparatively light labour. I mean a greater and more important element."

"He wants steadiness, you think?"

"No; I'll tell you what he wants—he wants pluck!"

Sir Stafford's cheek became suddenly crimson, and his blue eyes grew almost black in the angry expression of the moment.

"Pluck, sir? My son deficient in courage?"

"Not as you understand it now," resumed Grounsell, calmly. "He has enough, and more than enough, to shoot me or anybody else that would impugn it. The quality I mean is of a very different order. It is the daring to do a thing badly to-day in the certain confidence that you will do it better to-morrow, and succeed perfectly in it this day twelvemonth. He has not pluck to encounter repeated failures, and yet return every morning to the attack; he has not pluck to be bullied by mediocrity in the sure and certain confidence that he will live to surpass it; in a word, he has not that pluck which resists the dictation of

inferior minds, and inspires self-reliance through self-respect."

"I confess I cannot see that in the station he is likely to occupy such qualities are at all essential," said Sir Stafford, almost haughtily.

"Twenty thousand a year is a fine thing, and may dispense with a great many gifts in its possessor; and a man like myself, who never owned a twentieth of the amount, may be a precious bad judge of the requisites to spend it suitably; but I'll tell you one thing, Onslow, that organ the phrenologists call 'Combativeness' is the best in the whole skull."

"I think your Irish friend Dalton must have been imparting some of his native prejudices to you," said Onslow, smiling; "and, by the way, when have you seen him?"

"I went to call there last night, but I found a tea-party, and didn't go in. Only think of these people, with beggary staring them on every side, sending out for 'Caravan' tea at I don't know how many florins a pound."

"I heard of it; but then, once and away——"

"Once and away! Ay, but once is ruin."

"Well, I hope Prichard has arranged everything by this time. He has gone over this morning to complete the business; so that I trust, when we leave Baden, these worthy people will be in the enjoyment of easier circumstances.'"

"I see him crossing over the street now. I'll leave you together."

"No, no, Grounsell; wait and hear his report; we may want your advice besides, for I'm not quite clear that this large sum of arrears should be left at Dalton's untrammelled disposal, as Mr. Prichard intended it should be a test of that excellent gentleman's prudence."

Mr. Prichard's knock was now heard at the door, and next moment he entered. His pale countenance was slightly flushed, and in the expression of his face it might be read that he had come from a scene of unusual excitement.

"I have failed, completely failed, Sir Stafford," said he, with a sigh, as he seated himself, and threw a heavy roll of paper on the table before him.

As Sir Stafford did not break the pause that followed these words, Prichard resumed,—

"I told you last night that Mr. Dalton, not being able clearly to understand my communication, which I own, to prevent any searching scrutiny on his part, I did my best to envelop in a covering of technicalities, referred me to his eldest daughter, in whose acuteness he reposes much confidence. If I was not impressed with the difficulty of engaging such an adversary from his description, still less was I on meeting with the young lady this morning. A very quietly-mannered, unassuming person, with considerable good looks, which once upon a time must have been actual beauty, was seated alone in the drawing-room awaiting me. Her dress was studiously plain; and were it not for an air of great neatness throughout, I should perhaps call it even poor. I mention all these matters with a certain prolixity, because they bear upon what ensued.

"Without waiting for me to open my communication, she began by a slight apology for her presence there, occasioned, as she said, by her father's ill-health and consequent incapacity to transact business; after which she added a few words expressive of a hope that I would make my statement in the most simple and intelligible form, divested so far as might be of technical phraseology, and such as, to use her own words, a very unlettered person like herself might comprehend.

"This opening, I confess, somewhat startled me; I scarcely expected so much from her father's daughter; but I acquiesced and went on. As we concocted the whole plot together here, Sir Stafford, it is needless that I should weary you by a repetition of it. It is enough that I say, I omitted nothing of plausibility, either in proof of the bequest, or in the description of the feeling that prompted its fulfilment. I descanted upon the happy event which, in the course of what seemed an accident, had brought the two families together, and prefaced their business intercourse by a friendship. I adverted to the good influence increased comforts would exercise upon her father's health. I spoke of her sister and her brother in the fuller enjoyment of all that became their name and

birth. She heard me to the very end with deep attention, never once interrupting, nor even by a look or gesture expressing dissent.

"At last, when I had concluded, she said, 'This, then, is a bequest?'

"I replied affirmatively.

"'In that case,' said she, 'the terms on which it is conveyed will solve all the difficulty of our position. If my uncle Godfrey intended this legacy to be a peace-offering, however late it has been in coming, we should have no hesitation in accepting it; if he meant that his generosity should be trammelled by conditions, or subject in any way to the good pleasure of a third party, the matter will have a different aspect. Which is the truth?'

"I hesitated at this point-blank appeal, so different from what I looked for, and she at once asked to see the will. Disconcerted still more, I now prevaricated, stating that I had not brought the document with me; that a memorandum of its provisions would, I had supposed, prove sufficient; and finally assured her that acceptance of the bequest involved neither a condition nor a pledge.

"'It may, however, involve an obligation, sir,' said she, firmly. 'Let us learn if such be the case.'

"'Are you so proud, Miss Dalton,' said I, 'that you cannot even submit to an obligation?'

"She blushed deeply, and with a weak voice answered,—

"'We are too poor to incur a debt.'

"Seeing it was useless to dwell longer on this part of the subject, I adverted to her father's increasing age, his breaking health, and the necessity of affording him a greater share of comforts, but she suddenly stopped me, saying,—

"'You may make my refusal of this favour—for such it is, and nothing less—a more painful duty than I deemed it, but you cannot alter my resolution, sir. Poverty, so long as it is honourable, has nothing mean nor undeserving about it, but dependence can never bestow happiness. It is true, as you say, that my dear father might have around him many of those little luxuries that he once was used to; but with what changed hearts would not his children minister them to him? Where would be

that high prompting sense of duty that every self-sacrifice is met by now? Where that rich reward of an approving spirit that lightens toil and makes even weariness blessed? Our humble fortunes have linked us closer together; the storms of the world have made us draw nearer to each other, have given us one heart, hope, and love alike. Leave us, then, to struggle on, nor cast the gloom of dependence over days that all the ills of poverty could not darken. We are happy now; who can tell what we should become hereafter?'

"I tried to turn her thoughts upon her brother, but she quickly stopped me, saying,—

"'Frank is a soldier; the rewards in his career are never withheld from the deserving; at all events, wealth would be unsuitable to him. He never knew but narrow fortunes, and the spirit that becomes a more exalted condition is not the growth of a day.'

"I next ventured, but with every caution and delicacy, to inquire whether your aid and influence might not avail them in any future plans of life they might form?

"'We have no plans,' said she, simply; 'or, rather, we have had so many, that they all resolve themselves into mere castle-building. My dear father longs for Ireland again—for home as he still calls it—forgetting that we have no longer a home there. He fancies warm-hearted friends and neighbours—an affectionate people, attached to the very traditions of his name; but it is now wiser to feed this delusion than destroy it, by telling him that few, scarcely one, of his old companions still live—that other influences, other fortunes, other names, have replaced ours; we should go back there as strangers, and without even the stranger's claim to kind acceptance. Then, we had thought of the new world beyond seas; but these are the lands of the young, the ardent, and the enterprising, high in hope and resolute of heart; and so, at last, we deemed it wisest to seek out some quiet spot, in some quiet country, where our poverty would, at least, present nothing remarkable, and there to live for each other; and we are happy—so happy that, save the passing dread that this delicious calm of life may not be lasting, we have few sorrows.'

"Again and again I tried to persuade her to recall her decision, but in vain. Once only did she show any sign of hesitation. It was when I charged her with pride as the reason of refusal. Then suddenly her eyes filled up, and her lip trembled, and such a change came over her features that I grew shocked at my own words.

"'Pride!' cried she. 'If you mean that inordinate self-esteem that prefers isolation to sympathy—that rejects an obligation from mere haughtiness—I know not the feeling. Our pride is not in our self-sufficiency—for every step in life teaches us how much we owe to others; but in this, that low in lot, and humble in means, we have kept, and hope still to keep, the motives and principles that guided us in happier fortunes. Yes, you may call us proud, for we are so;—proud that our poverty has not made us mean—proud that in a strange land we have inspired sentiments of kindness, and even of affection—proud that, without any of the gifts or graces which attract, we have drawn towards us this instance of noble generosity of which you are now the messenger. I am not ashamed to own pride in all these.'

"To press her further was useless; and only asking, that if by any future change of circumstances she might be induced to alter her resolve, she would still consider the proposition as open to her acceptance, I took my leave."

"This is most provoking," exclaimed Onslow.

"Provoking!" cried Grounsell; "you call it provoking! That where you sought to confer a benefit you discover a spirit greater than all the favours wealth ever gave, or ever will give! A noble nature, that soars above every accident of fortune, provoking!"

"I spoke with reference to myself," replied Onslow, tartly; "and I repeat, it is most provoking that I am unable to make a recompense where I have unquestionably inflicted a wrong!"

"Rather thank God that in this age of money-seeking and gold-hunting there lives one whose heart is uncorrupted and incorruptible," cried Grounsell.

"If I had not seen it I could not have believed it!" said Prichard.

"Of course not, sir," chimed in Grounsell, bluntly. "Yours is not the trade where such instances are frequently met with; nor have I met with many myself!"

"I beg to observe," said Prichard, mildly, "that even in *my* career I have encountered many acts of high generosity."

"Generosity! Yes, I know what that means. A sister who surrenders her legacy to a spendthrift brother—a childless widow that denies herself the humblest means of comfort to help the ruined brother of her lost husband—a wife who places in a reckless husband's hand the last little remnant of fortune that was hoarded against the day of utter destitution; and they are always women who do these things—saving, scraping, careful creatures, full of self-denial and small economies. Not like your generous men, as the world calls them, whose free-heartedness is nothing but selfishness—whose liberality is the bait to catch flattery. But it is not of generosity I speak here. To give, even to one's last farthing, is far easier than to refuse help when you are needy. To draw the rags of poverty closer, to make their folds drape decently, and hide the penury within, that is the victory, indeed."

"Mark you," cried Onslow, laughing, "it is an old bachelor says all this."

Grounsell's face became scarlet, and as suddenly pale as death; and, although he made an effort to speak, not a sound issued from his lips. For an instant the pause which ensued was unbroken, when a tap was heard at the door. It was a message from Lady Hester, requesting, if Sir Stafford were disengaged, to be permitted to speak with him.

"You're not going, Grounsell?" cried Sir Stafford, as he saw the doctor seize his hat; but he hastened out of the room without speaking, while the lawyer, gathering up his papers, prepared to follow him.

"We shall see you at dinner, Prichard?" said Sir Stafford. "I have some hope of joining the party myself to-day."

Mr. Prichard bowed his acknowledgments, and departed.

And now the old baronet sat down to ponder in his

mind the reasons for so strange an event as a visit in the forenoon from Lady Hester. "What can it mean? She can't want money," thought he; "'tis but the other day I sent her a large cheque. Is she desirous of going back to England again? Are there any new disagreements at work?" This last thought reminded him of those of whom he had been so lately hearing—of those whose narrow fortunes had drawn them nearer to each other, rendering them more tolerant and more attached, while in his own family, where affluence prevailed, he saw nothing but dissension.

As he sat pondering over this not too pleasant problem, a tall and serious-looking footman entered the room, rolling before him an arm-chair; another and not less dignified functionary followed, with cushions and a foot-warmer —signs which Sir Stafford at once read as indicative of a long interview, for her ladyship's preparations were always adopted with a degree of forethought and care that she very rarely exhibited in matters of real consequence.

Sir Stafford was contemplating these august demonstrations, when the solemn voice of an upper servant announced Lady Hester, and, after a second's pause, she swept into the room in all that gauzy amplitude of costume that gives to the wearer a seeming necessity of inhabiting the most spacious apartments of a palace.

"How d'ye do?" said she, languidly, as she sank down into her chair. "I had not the least notion how far this room was off; if Clements has not been taking me a tour of the whole house."

Mr. Clements, who was still busily engaged in disposing and arranging the cushions, blandly assured her ladyship that they had come by the most direct way.

"I'm sorry for it," said she, peevishly, "for I shall have the more fatigue in going back again. There, you're only making it worse. You never can learn that I don't want to be propped up like an invalid. That will do; you may leave the room. Sir Stafford, would you be good enough to draw that blind a little lower, the sun is directly in my eyes. Dear me, how yellow you are! or is it the light in this horrid room? Am I so dreadfully bilious-looking?"

"On the contrary," said he, smiling, "I should pronounce you in the most perfect enjoyment of health."

"Oh, of course, I have no doubt of that. I only wonder you didn't call it 'rude health.' I cannot conceive anything more thoroughly provoking than the habit of estimating one's sufferings by the very efforts made to suppress them."

"Sufferings, my dear? I really was not aware that you had sufferings."

"I am quite sure of that; nor is it my habit to afflict others with complaint. I'm sure your friend, Mr. Grounsell, would be equally unable to acknowledge their existence. How I do hate that man! and I know, Stafford, he hates us. Oh, you smile, as if to say, 'Only some of us;' but I tell you he detests us all, and his old schoolfellow—as he vulgarly persists in calling you—as much as the others."

"I sincerely hope you are mistaken——"

"Polite, certainly; you trust that his dislike is limited to myself. Not that, for my own part, I have the least objection to any amount of detestation with which he may honour me; it is the tribute the low and obscure invariably render the well-born, and I am quite ready to accept it; but I own it is a little hard that I must submit to the infliction beneath my own roof."

"My dear Hester, how often have I assured you that you were mistaken; and that what you regard as disrespect to yourself is the roughness of an unpolished, but sterling, nature. The ties which have grown up between him and me since we were boys together ought not to be snapped for the sake of a mere misunderstanding; and if you cannot or will not estimate him for the good qualities he unquestionably possesses, at least bear with him for my sake."

"So I should—so I strive to do; but the evil does not end there; he inspires everybody with the same habits of disrespect and indifference. Did you remark Clements, a few moments since, when I spoke to him about that cushion?"

"No, I can't say that I did."

"Why should you? nobody ever does trouble his head

about anything that relates to my happiness! Well, I remarked it, and saw the supercilious smile he assumed when I told him that the pillow was wrong. He looked over at *you*, too, as though to say, 'You see how impossible it is to please her.'"

"I certainly saw nothing of that."

"Even Prichard, that formerly was the most diffident of men, is now so much at his ease, so very much at home in my presence, it is quite amusing. It was but yesterday he asked me to take wine with him at dinner. The anachronism was bad enough, but only fancy the liberty!"

"And what did you do?" asked Sir Stafford, with difficulty repressing a smile.

"I affected not to hear, hoping he would not expose himself before the servants by a repetition of the request. But he went on, 'Will your ladyship'—I assure you he said that—'will your ladyship do me the honour to drink wine with me?' I merely stared at him, but never took any notice of his speech. Would you believe it? he returned to the charge again, and with his hand on his wine-glass began, 'I have taken the liberty——' I couldn't hear more, so I turned to George, and said, 'George, will you tell that man not to do *that*?'"

Sir Stafford could not restrain himself any longer, but broke out into a burst of hearty laughter. "Poor Prichard," said he, at last, "I almost think I see him before me!"

"You never think of saying, 'Poor Hester, these are not the associates you have been accustomed to live with!' But I could be indifferent to all these if my own family treated me with proper deference. As for Sydney and George, however, they have actually coventried me; and although I anticipated many sacrifices when I married, this I certainly never speculated upon. Lady Wallingcroft, indeed, warned me to a certain extent of what I should meet with; but I fondly hoped that disparity of years and certain differences, the fruits of early prejudices and habits, would be the only drawbacks on my happiness; but I have lived to see my error!"

"The event has, indeed, not fulfilled what was expected

from it," said Sir Stafford, with a slow and deliberate emphasis on each word.

"Oh! I comprehend you perfectly," said she, colouring slightly, and for the first time displaying any trait of animation in her features. "You have been as much disappointed as I have! Just what my aunt Wallingcroft prophesied. 'Remember,' said she—and I'm sure I have had good cause to remember it—'their ideas are not our ideas; they have not the same hopes, ambitions, or objects that we have; their very morality is not our morality!'"

"Of what people or nation was her ladyship speaking?" asked Sir Stafford, mildly.

"Of the City generally," replied Lady Hester, proudly.

"Not in ignorance either," rejoined Sir Stafford; "her own father was a merchant in Lombard Street."

"But the family are of the best blood in Lancashire, Sir Stafford."

"It may be so; but I remember Walter Crofts himself boasting that he had danced to warm his feet on the very steps of the door in Grosvenor Square which afterwards acknowledged him as the master: and as he owed his wealth and station to honest industry and successful enterprise, none heard the speech without thinking the better of him."

"The anecdote is new to me," said Lady Hester, superciliously; "and I have little doubt that the worthy man was merely embellishing an incident to suit the tastes of his company."

"It was the company around his table, as Lord Mayor of London!"

"I could have sworn it!" said she, laughing; "but what has all this to do with what I wished to speak about—if I could but remember what it was! These eternal digressions have made me forget everything."

Although the appeal was palpably directed to Sir Stafford, he sat silent and motionless, patiently awaiting the moment when recollection might enable her to resume.

"Dear me! how tiresome it is. I cannot think of what I came about, and you will not assist me in the least."

"Up to this moment you have given me no clue to it," said Sir Stafford, with a smile. "It was not to speak of Grounsell?"

"Of course not. I hate even to think of him!"

"Of Prichard, perhaps?" he said, with a half-sly twinkle of the eye.

"Just as little!"

"Possibly your friend Colonel Haggerstone was in your thoughts?"

"Pray do not call him my friend. I know very little of the gentleman; I intend even to know less. I declined to receive him this morning, when he sent up his card."

"An attention I fear he has not shown that poor creature he wounded, Grounsell tells me."

"Oh, I have it!" said she, suddenly; the allusion to Hans at once recalling the Daltons, and bringing to mind the circumstances she desired to remember. "It was exactly of these poor people I came to speak. You must know, Sir Stafford, that I have made the acquaintance of a most interesting family here—a father and two daughters—named Dalton——"

"Grounsell has already told me so," interrupted Sir Stafford.

"Of course, then, every step I have taken in this intimacy has been represented in the most odious light. The amiable doctor will have, doubtless, imputed to me the least worthy motives for knowing persons in their station?"

"On the contrary, Hester. If he expressed any qualification to the circumstance, it was in the form of a fear lest the charms of your society, and the graces of your manner, might indispose them to return with patience to the dull round of their daily privations."

"Indeed!" said she, superciliously. "A weak dose of his own acquaintance would be, then, the best antidote he could advise them! But, really, I must not speak of this man; any allusion to him is certain to jar my nerves, and irritate my feelings for the whole day after. I want to interest you about these Daltons."

"Nothing more easy, my dear, since I already know something about them."

"The doctor being your informant," said she, snappishly.

"No, no, Hester; many, many years ago, certain relations existed between us, and I grieve to say that Mr. Dalton has reason to regard me in no favourable light; and it was but the very moment I received your message, I was learning from Prichard the failure of an effort I had made to repair a wrong. I will not weary you with a long and a sad story, but briefly mention that Mr. Dalton's late wife was a distant relative of my own."

"Yes, yes; I see it all. There was a little love in the business—an old flame revived in after life—nothing serious, of course—but jealousies and misconstructions—to any extent. Dear me, and that was the reason she died of a broken heart!" It was hard to say if Sir Stafford was more amused at the absurdity of this imputation, or stung by the cool indifference with which she uttered it; nor was it easy to know how the struggle within him would terminate, when she went on: "It does appear so silly to see a pair of elderly gentlemen raking up a difference out of an *amourette* of the past century. You are very fortunate to have so quiet a spot to exhibit in!"

"I am sorry to destroy an illusion so very full of amusement, Lady Hester; but I owe it to all parties to say, that your pleasant fancy has not even the shadow of a colour. I never even saw Mrs. Dalton—never have yet met her husband. The event to which I was about to allude, when you interrupted me, related to a bequest——"

"Oh! I know the whole business, now! It was at your suit that dreadful mortgage was foreclosed, and these dear people were driven away from their ancient seat of Mount Dalton. I'm sure I've heard the story at least ten times over, but never suspected that your name was mixed up with it. I do assure you, Sir Stafford, that they have never dropped the most distant hint of you in connection with that sad episode."

"They have been but just, Lady Hester," said he, gravely. "I never did hold a mortgage over this property, still less exercised the severe right you speak of. But it is quite needless to pursue a narrative that taxes your patience so severely; enough to say, that through

Prichard's mediation, I have endeavoured to persuade Mr. Dalton that I was the trustee, under a will, of a small annuity on his life. He has peremptorily refused to accept it, although, as I am informed, living in circumstances of great poverty."

"Poor they must be, certainly. The house is wretchedly furnished, and the girls wear such clothes as I never saw before; not that they are even the worn and faded finery of better days, but actually the coarse stuffs such as the peasants wear!"

"So I have heard."

"Not even an edging of cheap lace round their collars; not a bow of ribbon; not an ornament of the humblest kind about them."

"And both handsome, I am told?"

"The younger, beautiful!—the deepest blue eyes in the world, with long fringed lashes, and the most perfect mouth you can imagine. The elder very pretty too, but sad-looking, for she has a fearful lameness, poor thing! They say it came from a fall off a horse, but I suspect it must have begun in infancy; one of those dreadful things they call 'spine.' Like all persons in her condition, she is monstrously clever; carves the most beautiful little groups in boxwood, and models in clay and plaster. She is a dear, mild, gentle thing, but I suspect with all that infirmity of temper that comes of long illness—at least, she is seldom in high spirits like her sister. Kate, the younger girl, is my favourite; a fine, generous, warm-hearted creature, full of life and animation, and so fond of *me* already."

If Sir Stafford did not smile at the undue emphasis laid upon the last few words, it was not that he had not read their full significance.

"And Mr. Dalton himself—what is *he* like?"

"Like nothing I ever met before; the oddest mixture of right sentiments and wrong inferences; of benevolence, cruelty, roughness, gentleness; the most refined consideration, and the most utter disregard for other people and their feelings, that ever existed. You never can guess what will be his sentiments at any moment, or on any subject, except on the question of family, when his

pride almost savours of insanity. I believe, in his own country, he would be nothing strange nor singular; but out of it, he is a figure unsuited to any landscape."

"It is hard to say how much of this peculiarity may have come of adverse fortune," said Sir Stafford, thoughtfully.

"I'm certain he was always the same; at least, it would be impossible to imagine him anything different. But I have not come to speak of him, but of his daughter Kate, in whom I am deeply interested. You must know, Sir Stafford, that I have formed a little plan, for which I want your aid and concurrence. It is to take this dear girl along with us to Italy."

"Take her to Italy! In what position, Lady Hester? You surely never intended any menial station?"

"Of course not: a kind of humble friend—what they call a 'companion' in the newspapers—to have always with one. She is exactly the creature to dissipate low spirits and banish ennui, and, with the advantages of training and teaching, will become a most attractive girl. As it is, she has not been quite neglected. Her French accent is very pure; German, I conclude, she talks fluently; she plays prettily—at least, as well as one can judge on that vile tinkling old harpsichord, whose legs dance every time it is touched—and sings very pleasingly those little German ballads that are now getting into fashion. In fact, it is the tone of society—that mannerism of the world—she is deficient in more than anything else."

"She certainly could not study in a better school than yours, Lady Hester; but I see some very great objections to the whole scheme, and without alluding to such as relate to ourselves, but simply those that regard the young lady herself. Would it be a kindness to withdraw her from the sphere wherein she is happy and contented, to mingle for a season or so in another and very different rank, contracting new habits of thought, new ideas, new associations, learning each day to look down upon that humble lot to which she must eventually return?"

"She need not return to it. She is certain to marry, and marry well. A girl with so many attractions as she will possess may aspire to a very high match indeed!"

"This is too hazardous a game of life to please my fancy," said Sir Stafford, dubiously. "We ought to look every contingency in the face in such a matter as this."

"I have given the subject the very deepest consideration," replied Lady Hester, authoritatively. "I have turned the question over and over in my mind, and have not seen a single difficulty for which there is not an easy remedy."

"Sydney certainly ought to be consulted."

"I have done so already. She is charmed with the project. She sees, perhaps, how few companionable qualities she herself possesses, and anticipates that Miss Dalton will supply that place towards me that she is too indolent and too indifferent to fill."

"How would the family receive such a proposition? They seem to be very proud. Is it likely that they would listen to a project of this nature?"

"There lies the only difficulty; nor need it be an insuperable one, if we manage cleverly. The affair will require delicate treatment, because if we merely invite her to accompany us, they will naturally enough decline an invitation, to comply with which would involve a costly outlay in dress and ornament, quite impossible in their circumstances. This must be a matter of diplomacy, of which the first step is, however, already taken."

"The first step! How do you mean?"

"Simply, that I have already, but in the deepest confidence, hinted the possibility of the project to Kate Dalton, and she is wild with delight at the bare thought of it. The dear child! with what rapture she heard me speak of the balls, and fêtes, and theatres of the great world! of the thousand fascinations society has in store for all who have a rightful claim to its homage, the tribute rendered to beauty, greater than that conceded to rank or genius itself! I told her of all these, and I showed her my diamonds!"

Sir Stafford made, involuntarily, a slight gesture with his hand, as though to say, "This last was the *coup de grace*."

"So far, then, as Kate is concerned, she will be a willing ally; nor do I anticipate any opposition from her

quiet, submissive sister, who seems to dote upon her. The papa, indeed, is like to prove refractory; but this must be our business to overcome."

Lady Hester, who at the opening of the interview had spoken with all the listlessness of ennui, had gradually worked herself up to a species of ardour that made her words flow rapidly—a sign well known to Sir Stafford that her mind was bent upon an object that would not admit of gainsay. Some experience had taught him the impolicy of absolute resistance, and trained him to a tactic of waiting and watching for eventualities, which, whether the campaign be civil, military, or conjugal, is not without a certain degree of merit. In the present case there were several escape-valves. The Daltons were three in number, and should be unanimous. All the difficulties of the plan should be arranged, not alone to their perfect satisfaction, but without a wound to their delicacy. Grounsell was certain to be a determined opponent to the measure, and would, of course, be consulted upon it. And, lastly, if everything worked well and favourably, Lady Hester herself was by no means certain to wish for it the day after she had conquered all opposition.

These, and many similar reasons, showed Sir Stafford that he might safely concede a concurrence that need never become practical, and making a merit of his necessity, he affected to yield to arguments that had no value in his eyes.

"How do you propose to open the campaign, Hester?" asked he, after a pause.

"I have arranged it all," said she, with animation. "We must visit the Daltons together, or—better still—you shall go alone. No, no; a letter will be the right thing—a very carefully-written letter, that shall refute by anticipation every possible objection to the plan, and show the Daltons the enormous advantages they must derive from it."

"As, for instance?" said Sir Stafford, with apparent anxiety to be instructed.

"Enormous they certainly will be!" exclaimed she. "First of all, Kate, as I have said, is certain to marry well, and will be thus in a position to benefit the others, who, poor things, can do nothing for themselves."

"Very true, my dear—very true. You see all these things far more rapidly, and more clearly, than I do."

"I have thought so long and so much about it, I suppose there are few contingencies of the case have escaped me; and now that I learn how you once knew and were attached to the poor girl's mother——"

"I am sorry to rob you of so harmless an illusion," interrupted he, smiling; "but I have already said I never saw her."

"Oh, you did say so! I forget all about it. Well, there was something or other that brought the families in relation—no matter what—and it must be a great satisfaction to you to see the breach restored, and through my intervention, too; for I must needs say, Sir Stafford, there are many women who would entertain a silly jealousy respecting one who once occupied the first place in their husband's esteem."

"Must I once more assure you that this whole assumption is groundless; that I never——"

"Quite enough—more than I ask for—more than I have any right to ask for," broke she in. "If you did not interrupt me—and pardon me if I say that this habit of yours is calculated to produce innumerable misconceptions—I say that, if I had not been interrupted, I would have told you that I regard such jealousies as most mean and unworthy. We cannot be the arbiters of our affections any more than of our fortunes; and if in early life we may have formed attachments—imprudent attachments——" Here her ladyship, who had unwittingly glided from the consideration of Sir Stafford's case to that of her own, became confused and flurried, her cheek flushing and her chest heaving; she looked overwhelmed with embarrassment, and it was only after a long struggle to regain the lost clue to her discourse she could falteringly say, "Don't you agree with me? I'm sure you agree with me."

"I'm certain I should if I only understood you aright," said he, good-naturedly, and by his voice and look at once reassuring her.

"Well, so far, all is settled," said she, rising from her chair. "And now for this letter; I conclude the sooner

it be done the better. When may we hope to get away from this dreary place?"

"Grounsell tells me, by Friday or Saturday next I shall be able for the journey."

"If it had not been to provoke me, I'm certain he would have pronounced you quite well ten days ago."

"You forget, Hester, my own sensations—not to say sufferings—could scarcely deceive me."

"On the contrary, Doctor Clarus assured me there is nothing in the world so very deceptive; that pain is only referred to the diseased part by the brain, and has no existence whatever, and that there is no such thing as pain at all. He explained it perfectly, and I understood it all at the time. He is *so* clever, Doctor Clarus, and gives people such insight into the nature of their malady, that it really becomes quite interesting to be ill under his care. I remember when William, the footman, broke his arm, Clarus used to see him every day; and to show that no union, as it is called, could take place so long as motion continued, he would gently grate the fractured ends of the bone together."

"And was William convinced of the no-pain doctrine?" cried Sir Stafford, his cheek flashing with momentary anger.

"The ignorant creature actually screamed out every time he was touched; but Clarus said it would take at least two centuries to conquer the prejudices of the common people."

"Not improbable either!" said Sir Stafford.

"Dear me, how very late it is!" cried she, suddenly; "and we dine at six!" And with a graceful motion of the hand, she said, "By-by!" and left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE "SAAL" OF "THE RUSSIE."

HAS the observant reader ever remarked a couple of persons parading the deck of a ship at sea—walking step for step through half a day, turning with the same short jerk, to resume the same short path, and yet never interchanging a word, the rhythm of the footfall the only tie of companionship between them? They halt occasionally, too, to look over the bulwarks at some white sail far away, or some cloud-bank rising from the horizon; mayhap they linger to watch the rolling porpoises as they pass, or the swift nautilus as he glides along; but yet never a sound nor token of mutual intelligence escapes them. It is enough that they live surrounded by the same influences, breathe the same air, and step in the same time; they have their separate thoughts, wide, perhaps, as the poles asunder, and yet by some strange magnetism they feel there is a kind of sociality in their speechless intercourse.

From some such cause, perhaps, it was that Colonel Haggerstone and Jekyl took their accustomed walk in the dreary dining-room of the "Hôtel de Russie." The evening was cold and cheerless, as on that when first we met them there—a drifting rain, mingled with sleet, beat against the windows, and the wind, in mournful cadences, sighed along the dreary and deserted corridors. It was a comfortless scene within doors and without. A chance glance through the window—an occasional halt to listen when the thunder rolled louder and nearer, showed that, to a certain extent, the same emotions were common to each; but nothing else betrayed any community of sentiment between them, as they paced the room from end to end.

"English people come abroad for climate!" said Haggerstone, as he buttoned his collar tightly around his neck,

and pressed his hat more firmly on his head. "But who ever saw the like of this in England?"

"In England you have weather, but no climate!" said Jekyl, with one of his little smiles of self-approval, for he caressed himself when he uttered a *mot*, and seemed to feel no slight access of self-satisfaction.

"It's not the worst thing we have there, sir, I promise you," rejoined Haggerstone, authoritatively.

"Our coughs and rheumatics are, indeed, sore drawbacks upon patriotism."

"I do not speak of *them*, sir; I allude to our insolent, overbearing aristocracy, who, sprung from the people as they are, recruited from the ranks of trade or law, look down upon the really ancient blood of the land—the untitled nobility. Who are they, sir, that treat us thus? The fortunate speculator, who has amassed a million; the Attorney-General, who has risen to a Chief-Justiceship; men without ancestry, without landed influence; a lucky banker, perhaps, like our friend upstairs, may stand in the *Gazette* to-morrow or next day as Baron or Viscount, without one single requirement of the station, save his money."

"I confess, if I have a weakness, it is for lords," said Jekyl, simperingly. "I suppose I must have caught it very early in life, for it clings to me like an instinct."

"I feel happy to avow that I have none, sir. Six centuries of gentry blood suffice for all my ambitions; but I boil over when I see the overweening presumption of these new people."

"After all, new people, like a new watch, a new coat, and a new carriage, have the best chance of lasting. Old and worn out are very nearly convertible terms."

"These are sentiments, sir, which would, doubtless, do you excellent service with the family upstairs, but are quite thrown away upon such a mere country gentleman as myself."

Jekyl smiled, and drew up his cravat, with his habitual simpering air, but said nothing.

"Do you purpose remaining much longer here?" asked Haggerstone, abruptly.

"A few days, at most."

"Do you turn north or south?"

"I fancy I shall winter in Italy."

"The Onslows, I believe, are bound for Rome?"

"Can't say," was the short reply.

"Just the sort of people for Italy. The fashionables of what the Chinese call 'second chop' go down admirably at Rome or Naples."

"Very pleasant places they are, too," said Jekyl, with a smile. "The climate permits everything—even dubious intimacies."

Haggerstone gave a short "Ha!" at the heresy of this speech, but made no other comment on it.

"They say that Miss Onslow will have about a hundred thousand pounds?" said Haggerstone, with an air of inquiry.

"What a deal of maccaroni and parmesan that sum would buy!"

"Would you have her marry an Italian, sir?"

"Perhaps not, if she were to consult me on the matter," said Jekyl, blandly; "but as this is, to say the least, not very probable, I may own that I like the mixed marriages well enough."

"They make miserable *ménages*, sir," broke in Haggerstone.

"But excessively agreeable houses to visit at."

"The Onslows are scarcely the people to succeed in that way," rejoined Haggerstone, whose thoughts seemed to revolve round this family without any power to wander from the theme. "Mere money—nothing but money to guide them."

"Not a bad pilot either, as times go."

Haggerstone uttered another short "Ha!" as though to enter a protest against the sentiment without the trouble of a refutation. He had utterly failed in all his efforts to draw Jekyl into a discussion of the banker's family, or even obtain from that excessively cautious young gentleman the slightest approach to an opinion about them; and yet it was exactly in search of this opinion that he had come down to take his walk that evening. It was in the hope that Jekyl might afford him some clue to these people's thoughts, or habits, or their intentions for

the coming winter, that he had promenaded for the last hour and a half. "If he know anything of them," thought Haggerstone, "he will be but too proud to show it, and display the intimacy to its fullest extent!"

It was, then, to his utter discomfiture, he learned that Jekyl had scarcely spoken to Lady Hester, and never even seen Sir Stafford or Miss Onslow. It was, then, pure invention of the waiter to say that they were acquainted. "Jeykl has done nothing," muttered he to himself, "and I suppose I need not throw away a dinner upon him to tell it."

Such were his reasonings; and long did he balance in his own mind whether it were worth while to risk a bottle of Burgundy in such a cause; for often does it happen that the fluid thrown down the pump is utterly wasted, and that it is vain to moisten the sucker, if the well beneath be exhausted.

To be, or not to be? was then the eventful point he deliberated with himself. Haggerstone never threw away a dinner in his life. He was not one of those vulgarly-minded folk who ask you, in a parenthesis, to come in to "manger la soupe," as they say, without more preparation than the spreading of your napkin. No; he knew all the importance of a dinner, and, be it acknowledged, how to give it also, and could have distinguished perfectly between the fare to set before an "habitual diner out," and that suitable to some newly-arrived Englishman abroad: he could have measured his guest to a truffle! It was his boast that he never gave a pheasant when a poulet would have sufficed, nor wasted his "Chablis" on the man who would have been contented with "Barsac."

The difficulty was not, then, how to have treated Jekyl, but whether to treat him at all. Indeed, the little dinner itself had been all planned and arranged that morning; and the "trout" from the "Murg," and the grouse from Eberstein, had been "pricked off," in the bill of fare, for "No. 24," as he was unceremoniously designated, with a special order about the dish of whole truffles with butter, in the fair intention of inviting Mr. Albert Jekyl to partake of them.

If a lady reveals some latent desire of conquest in the

coquetry of her costume and the more than ordinary care of her appearance, so your male friend may be suspected of a design upon your confidence or your liberality by the studious propriety of his *petit dîner*. Never fall into the vulgar error that such things are mere accident. As well ascribe to chance the rotations of the seasons, or the motions of the heavenly bodies. Your *printanière* in January—your *épigramme d'agneau* with asparagus at Christmas, show a solicitude to please to the full as ardent, and not a whit less sincere, than the soft glances that have just set your heart a-beating from the recesses of yonder opera-box.

"Will you eat your cutlet with me to-day, Mr. Jekyl?" said Haggerstone, after a pause, in which he had weighed long and well all the *pros* and *cons* of the invitation.

"Thanks, but I dine with the Onslows!" lisped out Jekyl, with a languid indifference, that however did not prevent his remarking the almost incredulous amazement in the colonel's face; "and I perceive," added he, "that it's time to dress."

Haggerstone looked after him as he left the room; and then ringing the bell violently, gave orders to his servant to "pack up," for he would leave Baden next morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FAMILY DISCUSSION.

Something more than a week after the scenes we have just related had occurred, the Daltons were seated round the fire, beside which, in the place of honour, in an old arm-chair, propped by many a cushion, reclined Hans Roëckle. A small lamp of three burners—such as the peasants use—stood upon the table, of which only one was lighted, and threw its fitful gleam over the board, covered by the materials of a most humble meal. Even this was untasted; and it was easy to mark in the downcast and depressed countenances of the group that some deep care was weighing upon them.

Dalton himself, with folded arms, sat straight opposite the fire, his heavy brows closely knit, and his eyes staring fixedly at the blaze, as if expecting some revelation of the future from it; an open letter, which seemed to have dropped from his hand, was lying at his feet. Nelly, with bent-down head, was occupied in arranging the little tools and implements she was accustomed to use in carving; but in the tremulous motion of her fingers, and the short, quick heaving of her chest, might be read the signs of a struggle that cost heavily to subdue.

Half-concealed beneath the projection of the fireplace sat Kate Dalton—she was sewing; although to all seeming intent upon her work, more than once did her fingers drop the needle to wipe the gushing tears from her eyes, while at intervals a short sob would burst forth, and break the stillness around.

As for Hans, he seemed lost in a dreamy reverie, from which he rallied at times to smile pleasantly at a little wooden figure—the same which occasioned his disaster—placed beside him.

There was an air of sadness over everything; and even the old spaniel, Joan, as she retreated from the heat of the fire, crept with stealthy step beneath the table, as if respecting the mournful stillness of the scene. How different the picture from what that humble chamber had so often presented! What a contrast to those happy evenings, when, as the girls worked, Hans would read aloud some of those strange mysteries of Jean Paul, or the wild and fanciful imaginings of Chamisso, while old Dalton would lay down his pipe and break in upon his memories of Ireland, to ask at what they were laughing, and Frank look up distractedly from his old chronicles of German war to join in the mirth! How, at such moments, Hans would listen to the interpretation, and with what greedy ears follow the versions the girls would give of some favourite passage, as if dreading lest its force should be weakened or its beauty marred by transmission. And then those outbreaks of admiration that would simultaneously gush forth at some sentiment of high and glorious meaning—some godlike gleam of bright intelligence, which, though clothed in the language of a foreign land, spoke home to their hearts with the force that truth alone can speak!

Yes, they were, indeed, happy evenings! when around their humble hearth came thronging the groups of many a poet's fancy—bright pictures of many a glorious scene—emotions of heart that seemed to beat in unison with their own. They felt no longer the poverty of their humble condition—they had no memory for the little straits and trials of the bygone day, as they trod with Tieck the alley beneath the lindens of some rural village, or sat with Auerbach beneath the porch of the Vorsteher's dwelling. The dull realities of life faded before the vivid conceptions of fiction, and they imbibed lessons of patient submission and trustfulness from those brothers and sisters, who are poets' children.

And yet—what no darkness of adversity could rob them of—the first gleam of what, to worldly minds at least, would seem better fortune, had already despoiled them. Like the traveller in the fable, who had grasped his cloak the faster through the storm, but who threw it

away when the hot rays scorched him, they could brave the hurricane, but not face the sunshine.

The little wooden clock behind the door struck nine, and Dalton started up suddenly.

"What did it strike, girls?" asked he, quickly.

"Nine, papa," replied Kate, in a low voice.

"At what hour was he to come for the answer?"

"At ten," said she, still lower.

"Well, you'd better write it at once," said he, with a peevishness very different from his ordinary manner. "They've remained here already four days—isn't it four days she says?—to give us time to make up our minds; we cannot detain them any longer."

"Lady Hester has shown every consideration for our difficulty," said Kate. "We cannot be too grateful for her kindness."

"Tell her so," said he, bitterly. "I suppose women know when to believe each other."

"And what reply am I to make, sir?" said she, calmly, as having put aside her work, she took her place at the writing-table.

"Faith, I don't care," said he, doggedly. "Nor is it much matter what opinion I give. I am nobody now; I have no right to decide upon anything."

"The right and duty are both yours, papa."

"Duty! So I'm to be taught my duty as well as the rest!" said he, passionately. "Don't you think there are some others might remember that they have duties also?"

"Would that I could fulfil mine as my heart dictates them," said Ellen; and her lip trembled as she spoke the words.

"Faith! I scarce know what's my duty, with all the drilling and dictating I get," muttered he, sulkily. "But this I know, there's no will left me—I dare not budge this side or that without leave."

"Dearest papa, be just to yourself, if not to me."

"Isn't it truth I'm saying?" continued he, his anger rising with every word he spoke. "One day, I'm forbid to ask my friends home with me to dinner. Another, I'm told I oughtn't to go dine with *them*. I'm tutored and

lectured at every hand's turn. Never a thought crosses me, but it's sure to be wrong. You din into my ears, how happy it is to be poor when one's contented."

"The lesson was yours, dear papa," said Nelly, smiling. "Don't disavow your own teaching."

"Well, the more fool me. I know better now. But what's the use of it? When the prospect of a little ease and comfort was offered to me, you persuaded me to refuse it. Ay, that you did! You began with the old story about our happy hearth and contentment; and where is it now?"

A sob, so low as to be scarcely heard, broke from Nelly, and she pressed her hand to her heart with a convulsive force.

"Can you deny it? You made me reject the only piece of kindness ever was shown me in a life long. There was the opportunity of spending the rest of my days in peace, and you wouldn't let me take it. And the fool I was to listen to you!"

"Oh, papa, how you wrong her!" cried Kate, as, in a torrent of tears, she bent over his chair. "Dearest Nelly has no thought but for us. Her whole heart is our own."

"If you could but see it!" cried Nelly, with a thick utterance.

"'Tis a droll way of showing affection, then," said Dalton, "to keep *me* a beggar, and *you* no better than a servant-maid. It's little matter about *me*, I know. I'm old, and worn out—a reduced Irish gentleman, with nothing but his good blood remaining to him. But *you*, Kate, that are young and handsome—ay, faith! a deal sight better-looking than my lady herself—it's a little hard that you are to be denied what might be your whole fortune in life."

"You surely would not stake all her happiness on the venture, papa?" said Nelly, mildly.

"Happiness!" said he, scornfully; "what do you call happiness? Is it dragging out life in poverty, like this, with the proudest friend in our list an old toy-maker?"

"Poor Hanserl!" murmured Nelly, in a low voice; but, soft as were the accents, the dwarf heard them, and

nodded his head twice, as though to thank her for a recognition, of whose import he knew nothing.

"Just so! You have pity enough for strangers, but none for your own people," said Dalton, as he arose and paced the room, the very act of motion serving to increase his anger. "He was never used to better; he's just what he always was. But think of *me!* think of the expectations I was reared to, the place I used to hold, and see me now!"

"Dearest, best papa, do not say those bitter words," cried Kate, passionately. "Our own dear Nelly loves us truly. What has her life been but self-denial?"

"And have I not had my share of self-denial?" said he, abruptly. "Is there left a single one of the comforts I was always accustomed to. 'Tis sick I am of hearing about submission, and patience, and resignation, and the like, and that we never were so happy as now. Faith! I tell you, I'd rather have one day at Mount Dalton, as it used to be long ago, than I'd have twenty years of the life I spend here."

"No, papa, no," said Nelly, winding her arm around his waist, "you'd rather sit at the window yonder, and listen to a song from Kate—one of your own favourites—or take a stroll with us after sunset of a summer's evening, and talk of Frank, than go back to all the gaiety of that wild life you speak of."

"Who says so?" asked he, roughly.

"You yourself. Nay, don't deny it," said she, smiling.

"If I did I was wrong, then," rejoined he, pushing her rudely away. "It was because I believed my children were affectionate and fond, and that whatever I set my heart on they'd be sure to wish just as much as myself."

"And when has that time ceased to be?" said she, calmly.

"What!—when has it ceased to be?" said he, sharply. "Is it you that asks that question—you that made me refuse the legacy?"

"Nay, papa, be just," interrupted she, mildly. "The merit of that refusal was all your own. I did but explain to you the circumstances under which this gift—it was no less—was offered, and your own right feeling dictated the reply.'

Dalton was silent. A struggling sense of pride in his

imputed dignity of behaviour warring with the desire of fault-finding.

"Maybe I did!" said he, at last, self-esteem gaining the mastery. "Maybe I saw my own reasons for what I was going to do. A Dalton is not the man to mistake what's due to his name and family; but this is a different case. Here's an invitation, as elegant a piece of politeness as I have seen, from one our own equal in every respect; she calls herself a connection too—we won't say much about that, for we never reckoned the English relations anything—asking my daughter to join them in their visit to Italy. When are we to see the like of that again? Is it every day that some rich family will make us the same offer? It's not to cost us a sixpence; read the letter, and you'll see how nicely it's hinted that her ladyship takes everything upon herself. Well, if any one objected it might be myself; 'tis on me will fall the heaviest part of the blow. It was only the other day Frank left me; now I'm to lose Kate; not but I know very well Nelly will do her best."

Slight as was the praise, she kissed his hand passionately for it; and it was some seconds ere he could proceed.

"Yes, I'm sure you'll do all you can; but what is it after all? Won't I miss the songs she sings for me?—won't I miss her laughing voice and her sprightly step?"

"And why should you encounter such privations, papa?" broke Nelly in. "These are, as you justly say, the greatest sources of your happiness. Why separate from them? Why rob this humble chamber of its fairest ornament? Why darken our hearth by an absence for which nothing can requite us?"

"I'll tell you why, then," said he, and a sparkling gleam of cunning lit up his eye, as the casuistry crossed his mind. "Just because I can deny myself anything for my children's sake. 'Tis for them I am thinking always. Give old Peter Dalton his due, and nobody can call him selfish; not the worst enemy he had! Let me feel that my children are benefited, and you may leave me to trudge along the weary path before me."

"Then there only remains to see if this promise of benefit be real," said Nelly.

"And why wouldn't it? Doesn't everybody know that travelling and seeing foreign parts is equal to any education? How many things haven't I seen myself since I came abroad, that I never dreamed about before I left home! Look at the way they dress the peas—with sugar in them. See how they shoe a horse—with a leg tied up to a post, as if they were going to cut it off. Mind the droll fashion they have of fastening a piece of timber to the hind wheel of a coach, by way of a drag! There's no end to their contrivances."

"Let us forget every consideration but one," said Nelly, earnestly. "What are the dangers that may beset Kate, in a career of such difficulty, when, without an adviser, miles away from us all, she may need counsel or comfort. Think of her in sickness or in sorrow, or, worse than both, under temptation. Picture to yourself how dearly bought would be every charm of that refinement you covet for her, at the price of a heart weakened in its attachment to home, bereft of the simple faith that there was no disgrace in poverty. Think, above all," cried she—and for the first time her lips trembled, and her eyes swam—"think, above all, we cannot give her up for ever; and yet how is she to come back again to these humble fortunes, and the daily toil that she will then regard with shame and disgust. I ask not how differently shall we appear in her eyes, for I know that, however changed in her habits, how wide soever be the range of thought knowledge may have imparted, her fond, true heart will still be all our own; but can you risk her fortunes on an ocean like this?—can you peril all her future for so little?"

"To hear you talk, Nelly, one might think she was going to Jerusalem or Australia; sure, after all, it's only a few days away from us she'll be; and as for the dangers, devil a one of them I see. Peter Dalton's daughter is not likely to be ill-treated anywhere. We were always a 'good warrant' for taking care of our own; and, to make short of it, I wish it, and Kate herself wishes it, and I don't see why our hopes should not be as strong as your fears."

"You remember, too, papa, that Dr. Grounsell agreed

with me, and spoke even more strongly than I did against the scheme."

"And didn't I pay him off for his interference? Didn't I give him a bit of my mind about it, and tell him that, because a man was employed as a doctor in a family, he ought not to presume to advise them on their own affairs? Faith, I don't think he'll trouble another patient with his counsel."

"We must not forget, sir, that if his counsel came unasked, his skill was unrequited; both came from a nature that wished us well."

"The advice and the physic were about the same value —both made me sick; and so you're like to do if you worry me any longer. I tell you now, my mind's made up, and go she shall!"

"Oh, papa, not if dear Nelly thinks——"

"What's that to me—don't I know more of the world than she does? Am I come to this time of life to be taught by a slip of a girl that never was ten miles out of her home? Sit down there now, and write the answer."

There was a stern determination in the way these last words were uttered that told Nelly how fruitless would be all further opposition. She had long since remarked, besides, how her father's temper reacted upon his health, and how invariably any prolonged excitement terminated in an attack of gout. Increasing age gave to these accesses of malady a character of danger, which she already began to remark with deep anxiety. Now she saw that immediate compliance with his wishes was the only alternative left.

She seated herself at the table, and prepared to write. For some seconds the disturbance of her thoughts, the mingled crowd of sensations that filled her mind, prevented all power of calm consideration; but the struggle was soon over, and she wrote on rapidly.

So silent was the chamber, so hushed was all within it, that the scratching noise of the pen alone broke the stillness. Speedily glided her hand across the paper, on which two heavy tears had already fallen—burning drops of sorrow that gushed from a fevered brain! A whole world of disaster, a terrible catalogue of ill, revealed

itself before her; but she wrote on. She felt that she was to put in motion the series of events whose onward course she never could control, as though she was to push over a precipice the rock that in its downward rush would carry ruin and desolation along with it; but she wrote on.

At last she ceased, and all was still; not a sound was heard in the little room, and Nelly leaned her head down upon the table and wept.

But while she wept she prayed—prayed, that if the season of trouble her thoughts foreshadowed should be inevitable, and that if the cup of sorrow must, indeed, be drained, the strength might be sent them for the effort. It might have been that her mind exaggerated the perils of separation, and the dangers that would beset one of Kate's temper and disposition. Her own bereavement might have impressed her with the misery that follows an unhappy attachment; and her reflective nature, shadowed by an early sorrow, might have coloured too darkly a future of such uncertainty. But a deep foreboding, like a heavy weight, lay upon her heart, and she was powerless to resist it.

These instincts of our nature are not to be undervalued, nor confounded with the weak and groundless terrors of the frivolous. The closing petals of the flower as the storm draws nigh, the wild cry of the sea-bird as the squall is gathering, the nestling of the sheep within the fold while yet the hurricane has not broke—are signs that, to the observant instincts, peril comes not unannounced.

"Shall I read it, papa?" said she, as she raised her head, and turned towards him a look of calm and beaming affection.

"You needn't," said he, roughly. "Of course, it's full of all the elegant phrases women like to cheat each other with. You said she will go; that's enough."

Nelly tried to speak, but the words would not come, and she merely nodded an acquiescence.

"And, of course, too, you told her ladyship that if it wasn't to a near relation of the family—one that had a kind of right, as I may say, to ask her—that I'd never have given my consent. Neither would I!"

"I said that you could give no higher proof of your confidence in Lady Hester's goodness and worth, than in committing to her charge all that we hold so dear. I spoke of our gratitude"—her voice faltered here, and she hesitated a second or so; our gratitude!—strange word to express the feeling with which we part from what we cling to so fondly!—" and I asked of her to be the mother of her who had none!"

"Oh, Nelly, I cannot go—I cannot leave you!" burst out Kate, as she knelt down, and buried her head in her sister's lap. "I feel already how weak and how unable I am to live among strangers, away from you and dear papa. I have need of you both!"

"May I never leave this spot if you're not enough to drive me mad!" exclaimed Dalton. "You cried two nights and a day because there was opposition to your going. You fretted till your eyes were red, and your cheeks all furrowed with tears; and now that you get leave to go—now that I consent to—to—to sacrifice—ay, to sacrifice my domestic enjoyments to your benefit—you turn short round and say you won't go!"

"Nay, nay, papa," said Nelly, mildly; "Kate but owns with what fears she would consent to leave us, and in this shows a more fitting mind to brave what may come, than if she went forth with a heart brimful of its bright anticipations, and only occupied with a future of splendour and enjoyment."

"I ask you again, is it into the backwoods of Newfoundland—is it into the deserts of Arabia she is going?" said Dalton, ironically.

"The country before her has perils to the full as great, if not greater than either," rejoined Nelly, lowly.

"There's a ring at the bell," said Dalton, perhaps not sorry to cut short a discussion in which his own doubts and fears were often at variance with his words; for while opposing Nelly with all his might, he was frequently forced to coincide secretly with that he so stoutly resisted. Vanity alone rose above every other motive, and even hardened his heart against separation and absence from his favourite child. Vanity to think that *his* daughter would be the admired beauty in the *salons*

of the great and highly born—that she would be daily moving in a rank the most exalted—that his dear Kate would be the attraction of courts—the centre of adulation wherever she went. So blinded was he by false reasoning, that he actually fancied himself a martyr to his daughter's future advancement, and that this inveterate egotism was a high and holy self-denial! "My worst enemy never called me selfish," was the balm that he ever laid on his chafed spirit, and always with success. It would, however, have been rather the part of friend, than of enemy, to have whispered that selfishness was the very bane and poison of his nature. It was his impulse in all the wasteful extravagance of his early life. It was his motive in all the struggles of his adversity. To sustain a mock rank—to affect a mock position—to uphold a mock standard of gentility, he was willing to submit to a thousand privations of his children and himself; and to gratify a foolish notion of family pride, he was ready to endure anything—even to separation from all he held dearest.

"Lady Hester's courier has come for the answer to her note, papa," said Nelly, twice over, before Dalton heard her, for he was deep sunk in his own musings.

"Let him come in and have a glass of wine," said Dalton. "I'd like to ask him a few questions about these people."

"Oh, papa!" whispered Nelly, in a tone at once so reproachful, that the old man coloured and looked away.

"I meant about what time they were to start on the journey," said he, confusedly.

"Lady Hester told us they should leave this to-morrow, sir."

"Short notice for us. How is Kate to have all her clothes packed, and everything arranged? I don't think that is treating us with much respect, Nelly."

"They have waited four days for our decision, papa—remember that."

"Ay, to be sure. I was forgetting that; and she came every day to press the matter more and more; and there was no end to the note-writing besides. I must say that nothing could beat their politeness. It was a mighty

nice attention, the old man coming himself to call here; and a fine, hale, good-looking man he is! a better figure than ever his son will be. I don't much like Mr. George, as they call him.

"Somewhat colder, and more reserved, I think, than the other," said Nelly. "But about this answer, papa?"

"What a hurry they're in. Is it a return to a writ, that they must press for it this way? Well, well, I ought to be used to all manner of interruptions and disturbances by this time. Fetch me a candle, till I seal it;" and he sighed, as he drew forth his old-fashioned watch, to which, by a massive steel chain the great family seal was attached, firmly persuaded that in the simple act he was about to perform he was achieving a mighty labour, at the cost of much fatigue. "No rest for the wicked! as my old father used to say," muttered he, in a happy ignorance whether the philosophy emanated from his parent, or from some higher authority. "One would think that at my time of life a man might look for a little peace and ease; but Peter Dalton hasn't such luck! Give me the letter," said he, querulously. "There is Peter Dalton's hand and seal—his act and will," muttered he, with a half-solemnity, as he pressed the wax with his heavy signet. "'*Semper eadem;*' there's the ancient motto of our house, and, faith, I believe Counsellor O'Shea was right when he translated it 'The devil a better!'"

He read the address two or three times over to himself, as if there was something pleasurable in the very look of the words, and then he turned his glance towards Hans, as in a dreamy half-consciousness he sat still, contemplating the little statue of Marguerite.

"Isn't it droll to think we'd be writing to the first in the land, and an old toy-maker sitting beside the fire all the time," said Dalton, as he shook his head thoughtfully, in the firm conviction that he had uttered a very wise and profound remark. "Well—well—well! Life is a queer thing!"

"Is it not stranger still that we should have won the friendship of poor Hanserl, than have attracted the notice of Lady Hester?" said Nelly. "Is it not a prouder

thought that we have drawn towards us from affectionate interest the kindness that has no touch of condescension?"

"I hope you are not comparing the two," said Dalton, angrily. "What's the creature muttering to himself?"

"It's Gretchen's song he's trying to remember," said Kate.

"Nach ihm nur schau' ich
Zum Fenster hinaus!"

said Hans, in a low, distinct voice. "'Was kommt nach,' —what comes next, Fräulein?"

"You must ask sister Nelly, Hanserl," said Kate; but Nelly was standing behind the massive stove, her face covered with her hands.

"'Zum Fenster hinaus,'" repeated he, slowly; "and then, Fräulein? and then?"

"Tell him, Nelly; tell him what follows."

"Nach ihm nur schau' ich
Zum Fenster hinaus;
Nach ihm nur geh' ich
Aus dem Haus!"

repeated she.

"Ja, ja!" cried Hans, delightedly,—

"Nach ihm nur geh' ich
Aus dem Haus!"

"What does that mean?" said Dalton, with impatience.

"It's Gretchen's song, papa," said Nelly,—

"His figure I gaze on,
O'er and o'er;
His step I follow
From the door."

"I hope it isn't in love the creature is," said Dalton; and he laughed heartily at the conceit, turning at the same time his look from the dwarf, to bestow a most complacent glance at the remains of his own once handsome stature. "Oh dear! oh dear!" sighed he; "isn't it

wonderful, but there isn't a creth or a cripple that walks the earth that hasn't a sweetheart!"

A cough, purposely loud enough to announce his presence, here came from the courier in the antechamber, and Dalton remembered that the letter had not yet been despatched.

"Give it to him, Nelly," said he, curtly.

She took the letter in her hand, but stood for a second or two as if powerless to move.

"Must it be so, dearest papa?" said she, and the words almost choked her utterance.

Dalton snatched the letter from her fingers, and left the room. His voice was heard for an instant in conversation with the courier, and the moment after the door banged heavily, and all was still.

"It is done, Kate!" said she, throwing her arms around her sister's neck. "Let us now speak of the future; we have much to say, and short time to say it; and first let us help poor Hans downstairs."

The dwarf, clutching up the wooden image, suffered himself to be aided with all the submissiveness of a patient child, and, with one at either side of him, slowly crept down the stairs to his own chamber. Disengaging himself by a gentle effort as he gained his door, Hans removed his cap from his head and made a low and deep obeisance to each of the girls separately, while he bade them a good night.

"Leb wohl, Hanserl, Leb wohl!" said Kate, taking his hand affectionately. "Be ever the true friend that thou hast proved hitherto, and let me think of thee, when far away, with gratitude."

"Why this? How so, Fräulein?" said Hans, anxiously; "why farewell? why sayest thou 'Leb wohl,' when it is but 'good night'?"

"Kate is about to leave us for a short space," said Nelly, affecting to appear at ease and calm. "She is going to Italy, Hanserl."

"Das schöne Land!—that lovely land!" muttered he, over and over. "Dahin, dahin," cried he, pointing with his finger to the southward, "where the gold orange blooms. There would I wander too."

"You'll not forget me, Hanserl?" said the young girl, kindly.

"Over the great Alps and away!" said Hans, still talking to himself; "over the high snow-peaks which cast their shadows on our cold land, but have terraces for the vine and olive-garden, yonder! Thou'lt leave us, then, Fräulein?"

"But for a little while, Hans, to come back afterwards and tell thee all I have seen."

"They come not back from the sunshine to the shade," said Hans, solemnly. "Thou'lt leave not the palace for the peasant's hut; but think of us, Fräulein, think sometimes, when the soft sirocco is playing through thy glossy hair—when sounds of music steal over thy senses among the orange groves, and near the shadows of old temples—think of this simple Fatherland and its green valleys. Think of them with whom thou wert so happy, too! Splendour thou mayst have—it is thy beauty's right; but be not proud, Fräulein. Remember what Chamisso tells us, 'Das Noth lehrt beten'—'Want teaches Prayer,' and to that must thou come, however high thy fortune."

"Kate will be our own wherever she be," said Nelly, clasping her sister affectionately to her side.

"Bethink thee well, Fräulein, in thy wanderings, that the great and the beautiful are brethren of the good and the simple. The cataract and the dewdrop are kindred! Think of all that teaches thee to think of home; and remember well, that when thou losest the love of this humble hearth thou art in peril. If to any of thy childish toys thou sayest, 'Ich liebe dich nicht mehr,' then art thou changed indeed." Hans sat down upon his little bed as he spoke, and covered his face with his hands.

Nelly watched him silently for a few seconds, and then with a gentle hand closed the door and led Kate away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CARES AND CROSSES.

The lamp in Kate Dalton's chamber was still burning when the morning dawned, and by its uncertain flicker might be seen the two sisters, who, clasped in each other's arms, sat upon the low settle-bed. Nelly, pale and motionless, supported Kate, as, overcome by watching and emotion, she had fallen into a heavy slumber. Not venturing to stir, lest she should awaken her, Nelly had leaned against the wall for support, and, in her unmoved features and deathly pallor, seemed like some monumental figure of sorrow.

It was not alone the grief of an approaching separation that oppressed her. Sad as it was to part from one to whom she had been mother and sister too, her affliction was tinged with a deeper colouring in her fears for the future. Loving Kate dearer than anything in the world, she was alive to all the weak traits of her character; her credulity—her trustfulness—her fondness for approbation, even from those whose judgments she held lightly—her passion for admiration even in trifles—were well known to her; and while, perhaps, these very failings, like traits of childish temperament, had actually endeared her the more to Nelly, she could not but dread their effect when they came to be exercised in the world of strangers.

Not that Nelly could form the very vaguest conception of what that world was like. Its pleasures and its perils, its engagements and hazards, were all unknown to her. It had never been even the dream-land of her imagination. Too humble in spirit, too lowly by nature, to feel companionship with the great and titled, she had associated all her thoughts with those whose life is labour; with them were all her sympathies. There was a simple beauty in

the unchanging fortune of the peasant's life—such as she had seen in the Schwarzwald, for instance—that captivated her. That peaceful domesticity was the very nearest approach to happiness, to her thinking, and she longed for the day when her father might consent to the obscurity and solitude of some nameless "Dorf" in the dark recesses of that old forest. With Frank and Kate such a lot would have been a paradise. But one was already gone, and she was now to lose the other too. "Strange turn of fortune," as she said, "that prosperity should be more cruel than adversity. In our days of friendless want and necessity we held together; it is only when the promise of brighter destinies is dawning that we separate. It is but selfishness after all," thought she, "to wish for an existence like this; such humble and lowly fortunes might naturally enough become 'lame Nelly,' but Frank, the high-hearted, daring youth, with ambitious hopes and soaring aspirations, demands another and a different sphere of action; and Kate, whose attractions would grace a court, might well sorrow over a lot of such ignoble obscurity. What would not my sorrow and self-reproach be if I saw that, in submitting to the same monotony of this quietude, they should have become wearied and careless—neither taking pleasure in the simple pastimes of the people, nor stooping to their companionship? And thus all may be for the best," said she, half aloud, "if I could but feel courage to think so. We may each of us be but following his true road in life."

A long intimacy with affliction will very frequently be found to impress even a religiously-disposed mind with a strong tinge of fatalism. The apparent hopelessness of all effort to avert calamity, or stem the tide of evil fortune, often suggests, as its last consolation, the notion of a predetermined destiny, to which we are bound to submit with patient trustfulness; a temperament of great humility aids this conviction. Both of these conditions were Nelly's; she had "supped sorrow" from her cradle, while her estimate of herself was the very lowest possible. "I suppose it is so," said she again; "all is for the best."

She already pictured to herself the new spring this change of fortune would impart to her father's life—with what delight he would read the letters from his children—how he would once more, through them, taste of that world whose pleasures he was so fondly attached to. "*I* never could have yielded him a gratification like this," said Nelly, as the tears rose in her eyes. "I am but the image of our fallen fortunes, and in me, 'poor lame Nelly,' he can but see reflected our ruined lot. All is for the best—it must be so!" sighed she, heavily; and just as the words escaped, her father, with noiseless step, entered the chamber.

"To be sure it is, Nelly, darling," said he, as he sat down near her, "and glad I am that you've come to reason at last. 'Tis plain enough this isn't the way the Daltons ought to be passing their life, in a little hole of a place, without society or acquaintance of any kind. You and I may bear it—not but it's mighty hard upon me sometimes, too—but Kate there, just look at her and say, is it a girl like that should be wasting away her youth in a dreary village? Lady Hester tells me—and sure nobody should know better—that there never was the time in the world when real beauty had the same chance as now, and I'd like to see the girl that could stand beside her. Do you know, Nelly"—here he drew closer, so as to speak in a whisper—"do you know, that I do be fancying the strangest things might happen to us yet—that Frank might be a great general, and Kate married to God knows what sort of a grandee, with money enough to redeem Mount Dalton, and lay my old bones in the churchyard with my ancestors? I can't get it out of my head but it will come about, somehow. What do you think yourself?"

"I'm but an indifferent castle-builder, papa," said she, laughing softly. "I rarely attempt anything beyond a peasant hut or a shealing!"

"And nobody could make the one or the other more neat and comfortable, that I'll say for you, Nelly. It would have a look of home about it before you were a day under the roof!"

The young girl blushed deeply; for, humble as the

praise might have sounded to other ears, to hers it was the most touching she could have listened to.

"I'm not flattering you a bit. 'Tis your own mother you take after; you might put her down in the bleakest spot of Ireland, and 'tis a garden she'd make it. Let her stop for shelter in a cabin, and before the shower was over, you'd not know the place. It would be all swept and clean, and the dishes ranged neatly on the dresser; and the pig—she couldn't abide a pig—turned out, and the hens driven into the cowshed, and the children's faces washed, and their hair combed, and, maybe, the little gossoon of five years old upon her knee, saying his 'Hail, Mary,' or his 'A B C,' while she was teaching his mother how to wind the thread off the wheel, for she could spin a hank of yarn as well as any cottier's wife in the townland! The kind creature she was! But she never had a taste for real diversion; it always made her low-spirited and sad."

"Perhaps the pleasures you speak of were too dearly purchased, papa," said Nelly.

"Indeed, maybe they were," said he, dubiously, and as though the thought had now occurred for the first time; "and, now that you say it, I begin to believe it was that same that might have fretted her. The way she was brought up made her think so, too. That brother was always talking about wastefulness, and extravaganoe, and so on; and, if it was in her nature, he'd have made her as stingy as himself; and look what it comes to after all. *We* spent it when we had it—the Daltons are a good warrant for that—and there was he grubbing and grabbing all his days, to leave it after him to a rich man, that doesn't know whether he has so many thousands more or not."

Nelly made no reply, not wishing to encourage, by the slightest apparent interest, the continuance on the theme which invariably suggested her father's gloomiest reveries.

"Is that her trunk, Nelly?" said Dalton, breaking silence after a long interval, and pointing to an old and journey-worn valise that lay half-open upon the floor.

"Yes, papa," said Nelly, with a sigh.

"Why, it's a mean-looking, scrubby bit of a thing; sure it's not the size of a good tea-chest!" said he, angrily.

"And yet too roomy for all its contents, papa. Poor Kate's wardrobe is a very humble one."

"I'd like to know where's the shops here; where's the milliners and the haberdashers. Are we in College Green or Grafton Street, that we can just send out and have everything at our hand's turn? 'Tisn't on myself I spend the money. Look at these gaiters; they're nine years old next March; and the coat on my back was made by Peter Stevens, that's in his grave now! The greatest enemy ever I had could not face me down that I only took care of myself. If that was my way, would I be here now? See the rag I'm wearing round my throat—a piece of old worsted like a rug—a thing——"

He stopped, and stammered, and then was silent altogether, for he suddenly remembered it was Nelly herself who had worked the article in question.

"Nay, papa," broke she in, with her own happy smile; "you may give it to Andy to-morrow, for I've made you a smart new one, of your own favourite colours, too, the Dalton green and white."

"Many a time I've seen the same colours coming in first on the Corralin course!" cried Dalton, with enthusiasm; for at the impulse of a new word his mind could turn from a topic of deep and painful interest to one in every way its opposite. "You were too young to remember it; but you were there, in the 'landau,' with your mother, when Baithershin won the Murra handicap, the finest day's flat racing—I have it from them that seen the best in England—that ever was run in the kingdom. I won eight hundred pounds on it, and, by the same token, lost it all in the evening at 'blind hookey' with old Major Haggs, of the 5th Foot—not to say a trifle more besides. And that's her trunk!" said he, after another pause, his voice dropping at the words, as though to say, "What a change of fortune is there!" "I wonder neither of you hadn't the sense to take my old travelling chest, that's twice the size, and as heavy as a lead coffin besides. Sorrow one would ever know if she hadn't clothes for a whole lifetime! Two men wouldn't carry it upstairs when it's empty."

"When even this valise is too large, papa?"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" broke in Dalton; "you've no contrivance, after all. Don't you see that it's not what's inside I'm talking about at all, but the show before the world. Didn't I live at Mount Dalton on the fat of the land, and every comfort a gentleman could ask, five years and eight months after I was ruined? And hadn't I credit wherever I went, and for whatever I ordered? And why? Because of the house and place! I was like the big trunk beyond; nobody knew how little there was in it. Oh, Nelly dear, when you've seen as much of life as me, you'll know that one must be up to many a thing for appearance' sake."

Nelly sighed, but made no reply. Perhaps in secret she thought how much trouble a little sincerity with the world would save us.

"We'll be mighty lonesome after her," said he, after a pause.

Nelly nodded her head in sadness.

"I was looking over the map last night, and it ain't so far away, after all," said Dalton. "'Tisn't much more than the length of my finger on the paper."

"Many a weary mile may lie within that space," said Nelly, softly.

"And I suppose we'll hear from her every week, at least?" said Dalton, whose mind vacillated between joy and grief, but still looked for its greatest consolations from without.

Poor Nelly was, however, little able to furnish these. Her mind saw nothing but sorrow for the present; and, for the future, difficulty, if not danger.

"You give one no comfort at all," said Dalton, rising impatiently. "That's the way it will be always now, when Kate goes. No more gaiety in the house; not a song nor a merry laugh! I see well what a dreary life there is before me."

"Oh, dearest papa, I'll do my very best, not to replace her, for that I never could do, but to make your days less wearisome. It will be such pleasure, too, to talk of her, and think of her! To know of her happiness, and to fancy all the fair stores of knowledge she will bring back with her, when she comes home at last!"

"If I could only live to see them back again, Frank and Kate, one at each side of me, that's all I ask for in this world now," muttered he, as he stole noiselessly away, and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XIX.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ROAD.

If the arrival of a great family at an hotel be a scene of unusual bustle and excitement, with teeming speculations as to the rank and the wealth of the new-comers, the departure has also its interests, and even of a higher nature. In the former case all is vague, shadowy, and uncertain; the eye of the spectator wanders from the muffled figures as they descend, to scrutinize the lacqueys, and even the luggage, as indicative of the strangers' habits and condition; and even to the shrewd perceptions of that dread functionary—the head waiter—the identity of the traveller assumes no higher form, nor any more tangible shape, than that they are No. 42 or 57!

When the hour of leave-taking has come, however, their characters have become known, their tastes and habits understood, and no mean insight obtained into their prejudices, their passions, and their pursuits. The imposing old gentleman, whose rubicund nose and white waistcoat are the guarantees for a taste in port, has already inspired the landlord with a sincere regard. "My lady's" half-invalid caprices about diet, and air, and sunshine, have all written themselves legibly in "the bill." The tall son's champagne score incurred of a night, and uncounted of a morning, are not unrecorded

virtues; while even the pale young ladies, whose sketching propensities involved donkeys, and ponies, and picnics, go not unremembered.

Their hours of rising and retiring—their habits of society or seclusion—their preferences for the *Post* or the *Times*, have all silently been ministering to the estimate formed of them; so that in the commonest items of the hotel ledger are the materials for their history. And with what true charity are their characters weighed! How readily does mine host forgive the transgressions which took their origin in his own Burgundy! how blandly smile at the follies begotten of his Johannisberg! With what angelic temper does the hostess pardon the little liberties "young gentlemen from college *will* take!" Oh! if our dear, dear friends would but read us with half the charity, or even bestow upon our peccadilloes a tithe of this forgiveness! And why should it not be so? What are these same friends and acquaintances but guests in the same great inn which we call "the world"? and who, as they never take upon them to settle our score, need surely not trouble themselves about the "items."

While the Daltons were still occupied in the manner our last chapter has described, the "Hôtel de Russie" was a scene of considerable bustle, the preparations for departure engaging every department of the household within doors and without. There were carriage-springs to be lashed with new cordage; drag-chains new tipped with steel; axles to smear; hinges to oil; imperials to buckle on; cap-cases to be secured; and then what a deluge of small articles to be stowed away in most minute recesses, and yet be always at hand when called for! Cushions and cordials, and *chauffe-pieds* and "Quarterlies," smelling-boxes and slippers, and spectacles and cigar-cases, journals and "John Murrays"—to be disposed of in the most convenient places. Every corridor and landing was blocked up with baggage, and the courier wiped his forehead, and "*sacrê'd*" in half desperation at the mountain of trunks and portmanteaus that lay before him.

"This is not ours!" said he, as he came to a very

smart valise of lacquered leather, with the initials A. J. in brass on the top.

"No; that's Mr. Jekyl's," said Mr. George's man, Twig; "he ain't a-goin' with *you*—he travels in our britska."

"I'm more like de conducteur of a diligenz than a family courier," muttered the other, sulkily. "I know noting of de baggage, since we take up strangers at every stage! and always arme Teufeln—poor devils—that have not a sou en poche!"

"What's the matter now, Mister Greg'ry?" said Twig, who very imperfectly understood the other's jargon.

"The matter is, I will resign my 'fonction'—je m'en vais—dat's all! This is noting besser than an 'Eil wagen' mit passengers! Fust of all we have de doctor, as dey call him—wid his stuff birds and beasts, his dried blumen and sticks, till de roof is like de Jardin des Plantes at Paris, and he himself like de bear in de middle; den we have das verfluchte parroquet of milady, and Flounce, de lapdog, dat must drink every post-station, and run up all de hills for exercise! Dam! Ich bin kein Hund, and needn't run up de hills too! Mademoiselle Célestine have a what d'ye call 'Affe'—a ape! and though he be little, a reg'lar teufelchen to hide de keys and de money, when he find 'em; and den dere is de yong lady collectin' all de stones off de road—lauter paving-stones—which she smash wid a leetle hammer! Ach Gott—what is de world grow! when a Fräulein fall in love wid Felsen and Steine!"

"Monsieur Grégoire! Monsieur Grégoire!" screamed out a sharp voice from a window overhead.

"Mademoiselle!" replied he, politely touching his cap to the *femme-de-chambre*.

"Be good enough, Monsieur Grégoire, to have my trunks taken down—there are two in the fourgon, and a cap-case on the large carriage."

"Hagel and Sturm—dey are under everything. How am I——"

"I can't possibly say," broke she in, "but it must be done!"

"Can't you wait, mademoiselle, till we reach Basle?"

"I'm going away, Monsieur Grégoire. I'm off to Paris!" was the reply, as the speaker closed the sash and disappeared.

"What does she say?" inquired Twig, who, as this dialogue was carried on in French, was in total ignorance of its meaning.

"She has given her démission," said the courier, pompously—"resign her portefeuille, and she have made a very bad affair!—dat's all. Your gros milor is very often bien bête—he is very often rude, savage, forget his manners, and all dat—but"—and here his voice swelled into the full soundness of a perfect connection—"but he is *alway* rich. Ja—ja, immer reich!" said he over to himself. "Allons! now to get at her verdammte baggage! de two trunks, and de leetle box, and de ape, and de sac, and de four or five baskets! Diable d'affaire! Monsieur Tig, do me de grace to mount on high dere, and give me dat box."

"I've nothing to say to your carriage, Mister Greg'ry; I'm the captain's gentleman, and never do take any but a single-handed situation;" and with this very haughty speech, Mr. Twig lighted a fresh cigar and strolled away.

"Alle böse Teufeln holen de good for nichts," sputtered Grégoire, who now waddled into the house to seek for assistance.

Whatever apathy and indifference he might have met with from the English servants, the people of the hotel were like his bond-slaves. Old and young, men and women, the waiter, and the ostler, and the chambermaid—and that strange species of *grande utilité*, which in German households goes by the name of "Haus-knecht"—a compound of boots, scullion, porter, pimp, and drudge—were all at his command. Nor was he an over-mild monarch; a running fire of abuse and indignity accompanied every order he gave, and he stimulated their alacrity by the most insulting allusions to their personal defects and deficiencies.

Seated upon a capacious cap-case, with his courier's cap set jauntily on one side, his meerschaum like a sceptre in his hand, Grégoire gave out his edicts right royally; and soon the courtyard was strewn with trunks, boxes, and

bags of every shape, size, and colour. The scene, indeed, was not devoid of tumult; for, while each of the helpers screamed away at the top of his throat, and Grégoire rejoined in shouts that would have done credit to a bull, the parrot gave vent to the most terrific cries and yells as the ape poked him through the bars of his cage with the handle of a parasol.

"There, that's one of them," cried out Monsieur Grégoire, "that round box beside you; down with it here."

"Monsieur Grégoire—Monsieur Grégoire!" cried mademoiselle from the window once more.

The courier looked up, and touched his cap.

"I'm not going, Monsieur Grégoire; the affair is arranged."

"Ah! I am charmed to hear it, mademoiselle," said he, smiling in seeming ecstasy, while he muttered a malediction between his teeth.

"Miladi has made submission, and I forgive everything. You must pardon all the trouble I've given you."

"These happy tidings have made me forget it," said he, with a smile that verged upon a grin. "Peste!" growled he, under his breath, "we'd unpacked the whole fourgon."

"Ah que vous êtes aimable!" said she, sighing.

"Belle tigresse!" exclaimed he, returning the leer she bestowed; and the window was once more closed upon her exit. "I submitted to the labour, in the hope we had done with you for ever!" said he, wiping his forehead; "and la voilà—there you are—back again. Throw that ape down; away wid him, cursed beast!" cried he, venting his spite upon the minion, since he dare not attack the mistress. "But what have we here?"

This latter exclamation was caused by the sudden entrance into the courtyard of two porters, carrying an enormous trunk, whose iron fastenings and massive padlock gave it the resemblance of an emigrant's sea-chest. A few paces behind walked Mr. Dalton, followed again by Old Andy, who, with a huge oil-silk umbrella under one arm, and a bundle of cloaks, shawls, and hoods on the other, made his way with no small difficulty.

Grégoire surveyed the procession with cool amazement,

and then, with a kind of mock civility, he touched his cap, and said, "You have mistak de road, saar; de diligenz-office is over de way."

"And who told you I wanted it?" said Dalton, sternly. "Maybe I'm just where I ought to be! Isn't this Sir Stafford Onslow's coach?"

"Yes, saar; but you please to remember it is not de 'Eil wagen.'"

"Just hold your prate, my little chap, and it will be pleasanter, and safer—ay, safer, too, d'ye mind. You see that trunk there; it's to go up with the luggage and be kept dry, for there's valuable effects inside."

"Dat is not a trunk—it is a sentry-house, a watsch-box. No gentleman's carriage ever support a ting of dat dimension!"

"It's a trunk, and belongs to me, and my name is Peter Dalton, as the letters there will show you; and so no more about it, but put it up at once."

"I have de orders about a young lady's luggage, but none about a great coffin with iron hoops," said Grégoire, tartly.

"Be quiet, now, and do as I tell you, my little chap. Put these trifles, too, somewhere inside, and this umbrella in a safe spot; and here's a little basket, with a cold pie and a bottle of wine in it."

"Himmel and Erde! how you tink milady travel mit dass schweinerei?"

"It's not pork; 'tis mutton, and a pigeon in the middle," said Dalton, mistaking his meaning. "I brought a taste of cheese, too, but it's a trifle high, and maybe it's as well not to send it."

"Is the leetle old man to go too?" asked Grégoire, with an insolent grin, and not touching the profanation of either cheese or basket.

"That's my own servant, and he's not going," said Dalton; "and now that you know my orders, just stir yourself a little, my chap, for I'm not going to spend my time here with you."

A very deliberate stare, without uttering a word, was all the reply Grégoire returned to this speech; and then, addressing himself to the helpers, he gave some orders

in German about the other trunks. Dalton waited patiently for some minutes, but no marks of attention showed that the courier even remembered his presence, and at last he said,—

"I'm waiting to see that trunk put up; d'ye hear me?"

"I hear ver well, but I mind noting at all," said Grégoire, with a grin.

"Oh! that's it," said Dalton, smiling, but with a twinkle in his grey eyes that, had the other known him better, he would scarcely have fancied—"that's it, then!" And taking the umbrella from beneath Andy's arm, he walked deliberately across the yard to where a large tank stood, and which, fed from a small *jet d'eau*, served as a watering-place for the post-horses. Some taper rods of ice now stood up in the midst, and a tolerably thick coating covered the surface of the basin.

Grégoire could not help watching the proceedings of the stranger, as with the iron-shod umbrella he smashed the ice in one or two places, piercing the mass till the water spouted up through the apertures.

"Have you any friend who live dere?" said the courier, sneeringly, as the sound of the blows resembled the noise of a door-knocker.

"Not exactly, my man," said Dalton, calmly; "but something like it."

"What is't you do, den?" asked Grégoire, curiously.

"I'll tell you," said Dalton; "I'm breaking the ice for a new acquaintance;" and, as he spoke, he seized the courier by the stout leather belt which he wore around his waist, and, notwithstanding his struggles and his weight, he jerked him off the ground, and, with a swing, would have hurled him head foremost into the tank, when, the leather giving way, he fell heavily to the ground, almost senseless from shock and fright together. "You may thank that strap for your escape," said Dalton, contemptuously, as he threw towards him the fragments of broken leather.

"I will have de law, and de polizei, and de Gericht. I will have you in de Kerker, in chains, for dis!" screamed Grégoire, half choked with passion.

"May I never see peace, but if you don't hold your

prate I'll put you in it! Sit up there, and mind your business; and, above all, be civil, and do what you're bid."

"I will fort; I will away. Noting make me remain in de service," said Grégoire, brushing off the dirt from his sleeve, and shaking his cap. "I am respectable courier —travel wid de Fürsten vom Königlichen Haüsen—mit Russen, Franzosen, Ostereichen; never mit barbaren, never mit de wilde animalen."

"Don't, now—don't, I tell you," said Dalton, with another of those treacherous smiles whose expression the courier began to comprehend. "No balderdash! no nonsense! but go to your work, like a decent servant."

"I am no Diener; no serve anybody," cried the courier, indignantly.

But somehow there was that in old Dalton's face that gave no encouragement to an open resistance, and Monsieur Grégoire knew well the case where compliance was the wisest policy. He also knew that in his vocation there lay a hundred petty vengeances more than sufficient to pay off any indignity that could be inflicted upon him. "I will wait my times," was the reflection with which he soothed down his rage, and affected to forget the insult he had just suffered under.

Dalton, whose mind was cast in a very different mould, and who could forgive either himself or his neighbour without any great exertion of temper, turned now coolly away, and sauntered out into the street. The flush of momentary anger that coloured his cheek had fled, and a cast of pale and melancholy meaning sat upon his features, for his eye rested on the little wooden bridge which crossed the stream, and where now two muffled figures were standing, that he recognized as his daughters.

They were leaning on the balustrade, and gazing at the mountain that, covered with its dense pine-wood, rose abruptly from the river-side. It had been the scene of many a happy ramble in the autumn, of many a delightful excursion, when, with Frank, they used to seek for fragments of wood that suited Nelly's sculptures. How often had they carried their little basket up yonder steep path, to eat their humble supper upon the rock, from which the setting sun could be seen. There was not a cliff nor

crag, not a mossy slope, not a grass bank, they did not know; and now, as they looked, all the past moments of pleasure were crowding upon their memory, tinged with the sad foreboding that they were never again to be renewed.

"That's the Riesen Fels, Nelly, yonder," said Kate, as she pointed to a tall dark rock, on whose slopes the drifting snow had settled. "How sad and dreary it is, compared with what it seemed on Frank's birthday, when the nightingale was singing overhead, and the trickling stream came sparkling along the grass when we sat together. I can bear to part with it better thus, than if all were as beautiful as then."

Nelly sighed, and grasped her sister's hand closer, but made no answer.

"Do you remember poor Hanserl's song, and his little speech all about our meeting there again in the next year, Nelly?"

"I do," said Nelly, in a low and whispering voice.

"And then Frank stood up, with his little gilt goblet, and said,—

'With hearts as free from grief or care,
Here's to our happy——'

'Wiederkehr,' cried Hanserl, supplying the word so aptly, how we all laughed, Nelly, at his catching the rhyme?"

"I remember!" sighed Nelly, still lower.

"What are you thinking of, Nelly dearest?" said Kate, as she stood for a few seconds gazing at the sorrow-struck features of the other.

"I was thinking, dearest," said Nelly, "that when we were met together there on that night, none of us foresaw what since has happened. Not the faintest suspicion of a separation crossed our minds. Our destinies, whatever else might betide, seemed at least bound up together. Our very poverty was like the guarantee of our unity, and yet see what has come to pass—Frank gone; you, Kate, going to leave us now. How shall we speculate on the future, then, when the past has so betrayed us? How pilot our course in the storm, when, even in the calm, still sea, we have wandered from the track?"

"Nelly! Nelly! every moment I feel more faint-hearted

at the thought of separation. It is as though, in the indulgence of a mere caprice, I were about to incur some great hazard. Is it thus it appears to you?"

"With what expectations do you look forward to this great world you are going to visit, Kate? Is it mere curiosity to see with your own eyes the brilliant scenes of which you have only read? Is it with the hope of finding that elegance and goodness are sisters, that refinement of manners is the constant companion of noble sentiments and right actions? or, does there lurk in your heart the longing for a sphere wherein you yourself might contest for the prize of admiration? Oh! if this have a share in your wishes, my own dear sister, beware of it. The more worthy you are of such homage, the greater is your peril! It is not that I am removed from all temptations of this kind; it is not because I have no attractions of beauty, that I speak thus—even poor lame Nelly cannot tear from her woman's heart the love of admiration. But for *you*, I fear—for you, Kate, to whom these temptations will be heightened by your own deservings. You *are* beautiful, and you blush as I speak the word; but what if the time come when you will hear it unmoved—the modest sense of shame gone, what will replace it? Pride—yes, my dear sister, Pride and Ambition! You will long for a station more in accordance with your pretensions, more suited to your tastes."

"How you wrong me, Nelly!" burst Kate in. "The brightest dream of all this brilliant future is the hope that I may come back to you more worthy of your love; that, imbibing some of those traits whose fascinations we have already felt, I may bring beneath our humble roof some memories, at least, to beguile your toil."

"Oh, if that time should come!"

"And it will come, dearest Nelly," said Kate, as she threw her arms around her, and kissed her affectionately. „But, see! there is papa yonder; he is beckoning to us to join him." And the two girls hastened forward to where Dalton was standing, at the corner of the street.

"I'm thinking we ought to go up there, now," said Dalton, with a motion of his hand in the direction of the hotel. "Take my arm, each of you."

They obeyed, and walked along in silence, till they reached the inn, where Dalton entered, with a certain assumed ease and confidence, that very commonly, with him, covered a weak purpose and a doubting spirit.

"Is Sir Stafford at home, or Lady Onslow?" asked he of Mr. Twig, who, with a cigar in his mouth, and a *Galignani* in his hand, never rose from the seat he occupied.

"Can't say, sir," was the cool response, which he delivered without lifting his eyes from the newspaper.

"Do *you* know, ma'am?" said he, addressing Mademoiselle Célestine, who happened to pass at the moment—"do you know, ma'am, if Lady Onslow's at home?"

"She never receive in de morning," was the curt reply. And, with a very impudent stare at the two sisters, whose dress imposed no restraint upon her insolence, mademoiselle flounced past. "Come along, girls," said Dalton, angrily, and offended that he should appear to his children as if wanting in worldly tact and knowledge—"come with *me*." And he proceeded boldly upstairs.

A folding-door lay open before them into a large chamber, littered with boxes, trunks, and travelling gear of all kinds. Making his way through these, while he left his daughters outside, Dalton approached a door that led into an inner room, and knocked sharply at it with his knuckles.

"You may take it away now; I've used cold water!" cried a voice from within, that at once proclaimed Dr. Grounsell.

Dalton repeated his summons more confidently.

"Go to the devil, I say," cried the doctor; "you've made me cut my chin;" and the enraged Grounsell, with his face covered with lather, and streaming with blood, flung open the door in a passion. "Oh! Dalton, this you, and the ladies here," said he, springing back ashamed, as Kate's hearty burst of laughter greeted him. "Come in, Dalton, come in," said he, dragging the father forward and shutting the door upon him. "I was longing to see you, man; I was just thinking how I could have five minutes' talk with you. What answer have you given to the letter they've sent you?"

"What d'ye think?" said Dalton, jocularly, as he seated himself in a comfortable chair.

"What do I think?" repeated he twice or thrice over. "Egad, I don't know what to think! I only know what to hope, and wish it may have been!"

"And what's that?" said Dalton, with a look of almost sternness, for he was not ignorant of the doctor's sentiments on the subject.

"A refusal, of course," said Grounsell, who never yet was deterred by a look, a sign, or an innuendo, from any expression of his sentiments.

"And why so, sir?" rejoined Dalton, warmly.

"On every ground in the world. What has your fine, generous-hearted, dear child in common with that vile world of envy, malice, and all wickedness you'd throw her amongst? What similarity in thought, feeling, or instinct between *her* and that artificial class with whom you would associate her, with their false honour, false principle, and false delicacy—nothing real and substantial about them but their wickedness? If you were a silly woman, like the mother in the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' I could forgive you; but a man—a hardened, worldly man, that has tasted poverty, and knows the rubs of life—I've no patience with you, d—n me if I have!"

"A little more of this, and I'll have none with *you*," said Dalton, as he clenched his fist, and struck his knee a hard blow. "You presume to talk of us as people whose station was always what our present means imply; but I'd have you to know that we've better blood in our veins——"

"Devil take your blood! you've made me spill mine again," cried Grounsell, as he sliced a piece off his chin, and threw down the razor in a torrent of anger, while Dalton grinned a look of malicious satisfaction. "Couldn't your good blood have kept you above anything like dependence?"

Dalton sprang to his feet, and clutching the chair, raised it in the air; but as suddenly dashed it on the floor again, without speaking.

"Go on," cried Grounsell, daring him. "I'd rather you'd break *my* skull than that dear girl's heart; and

that's what you're bent on. Ay, break her heart! no less. You can't terrify me, man, by those angry looks. You can't wound me, either, by retaliating, and calling me a dependant. I know I am such. I know well all the ignominy, all the shame; but I know, too, all the misery of the position. But, mark me, the disgrace and the sorrow end where they begin—with myself alone. I have none to blush for me; I stand alone in the world, a poor, scathed, sapless, leafless trunk. But it is not so with *you*. Come, come, Dalton, you fancy that you know something of life because you have passed so many years of it among your equals and neighbours in your own country; but you know nothing—absolutely nothing—of the world as it exists here."

A hearty but contemptuous laugh broke from Dalton as he heard this speech. It was indeed somewhat of a surprise to listen to such a charge. He, Peter Dalton, that knew a spavined horse, or could detect a windgall better than any man in the county—he, that never was "taken in" by a roarer, nor deceived by a crib-biter—to tell him that he knew nothing of life!

"That'll do, doctor—that'll do," said he, with a most compassionating smile at the other's ignorance. "I hope you know more about medicine than you seem to do about men and women." And, with these words, he left the room, banging the door after him as he went, and actually ashamed that he had been betrayed into warmth by one so evidently deficient in the commonest knowledge of the world.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting, girls," said he, approaching them. "And, indeed, I might have spent my time better, too. But no matter; we must try and find out her ladyship now, for the morning is slipping over."

As he spoke, George Onslow appeared, and recognizing the party with much cordiality, conducted them to the breakfast-room, where Sir Stafford, Lady Hester, and Miss Onslow were seated. If Sydney's reception of the two sisters was less enthusiastic than Lady Hester's, it was not less kind. Nelly was won almost instantaneously by the unaffected ease and simplicity of her manner. As for Dalton himself, her ladyship had determined to carry

him by storm. She suffered him to declaim about his ancestors and their wealth; heard him with assumed interest in all his interminable stories of Daltons for six generations; and artfully opposed to his regrets at the approaching departure of his daughter the ingenious consolation that she was not about to sojourn with mere strangers, but with those united to her by the ties of kindred. George had, meanwhile, made two or three efforts to engage Kate in conversation, but, whether from the preoccupation of her mind, agitated as it well might be at such a moment, or that his topics were so utterly new and strange to her, his attempt was not attended with any signal success. A sense of shame, too, at the disparity of her own and her sister's appearance, in contrast with the quiet elegance of Lady Hester and Miss Onslow's dress, oppressed her. Strange was it that this feeling should have agitated her now, she who always hitherto had never wasted a thought on such matters, and yet she felt it acutely; and as she glanced from the rustling robe of silk to the folds of her own homely costume, her heart beat painfully, and her breathing came short. Was she already changed, that thoughts like these could impress her so strongly? Had Adam's first shame descended to his daughter? "How unlike I am to them!" was the bitter thought that rose to her mind, and ate like a cancer into her heart.

The sense of inferiority, galling and torturing as it is, becomes infinitely more unendurable when connected with matters of trivial importance. There is a sense of indignant anger in the feeling that we are surpassed by what seem the mere conventionalities and tricks of society, and although Kate knew not the source of her unhappiness, some of it lay in this fact. Every little gesture, every motion, the merest peculiarities of voice or accent, now struck her as distinctive of a class—a class to which no imitation would ever give her a resemblance. If it were not for very shame, she would have drawn back now at the eleventh hour. More than once was she on the verge of confessing what was passing within her mind, but fears of various kinds—of her father's anger, of ridicule, of the charge of frivolity—all conspired to keep her

silent, and she sat and listened to descriptions of pleasure and scenes wherein she had already lost every interest, and which somehow came associated with a sense of her own inferiority.

Never did home seem so regrettable as in that moment; the humble fireside in winter; the happy evenings with little Hanserl; the summer's day rambles in the forest; their little feasts beside the waterfall, under the ivy-clad walls of Eberstein—all rose before her. They were pleasures which had no alloy in her own humble lot, and why desert them? She had almost gained courage to say that she would not, when a chance word caught her ear —one word—how little to hang a destiny upon! It was Lady Hester, who, conversing in a half-whisper with Mr. Dalton, said,—

"She will be perfectly beautiful when dressed becomingly."

Was this, then, all that was needed to give her the stamp and semblance of the others? Oh, if she could believe it! If she could but fancy that, at some future time, such graceful elegance should be her own, that gentle languor, that chastened quietude of Sydney, or that sparkling lightness of Lady Hester herself!

"What time de horses, saar?" said the courier, popping his head into the room.

"I scarcely know—what do you say, Lady Hester?"

"I'm quite ready—this instant if you like—indeed, I'm always the first," said she, gaily; "nobody travels with less preparation than I do. There, see all I want!" and she pointed to a fan, and a book, and a smelling-bottle; as if all her worldly effects and requirements went no further, and that four great imperials and a dozen capacious boxes were not packed with her wardrobe. "I do detest the worry and fuss some people make about a journey for a week, or even a month beforehand; they unsettle themselves and every one around them; putting under lock and key half the things of every-day utility, and making a kind of 'gaol-delivery' of all the imprisoned old cloaks and dresses of the toilet. As for me, I take the road as I'd go to the Opera, or drive out in the Park—I ask for my bonnet, that's all."

There was some truth in this. Her ladyship did, in fact, give herself not a whit more thought or consideration for preparation of any kind, than if the excursion had been a promenade.

"It is now two o'clock," said Sir Stafford, "and if we mean to reach Offenburg to-night we must not lose more time. Isn't it Offenburg you advise as our halt, Mr. Jekyl?"

"Yes, Sir Stafford," simpered out that bland personage. "It is a most comfortable little inn, and a very praiseworthy cook."

"By the bye, has any one thought of ordering luncheon here?" cried George.

Jekyl gave a nod, to intimate that he had taken that precaution.

"And Mr. Jekyl," said Lady Hester, "what of those bullfinches, for I must have them?"

"They are safely caged and packed in our britska, madam. You'll also find that your sketch-book and the water-colours are available at any moment, Miss Onslow," said he, with a respectful gesture. She smiled, and bowed her thanks in silence.

"And de horses, saar?" asked the courier once more, for during this colloquy he had been standing in expectation of his orders.

"Do tell him, Mr. Jekyl," said Lady Hester, with that tone of languor that bespoke her dislike to the trouble of even a trifling degree of resolution.

"I think we shall say in one hour, Grégoire," said Jekyl, mildly. "And, perhaps, it would be better that you should see——" What this matter was that the courier should bestow his special attention upon is not on record in this history, inasmuch as that when the speaker had reached thus far, he passed out of the door, talking as he went, in a low and confidential voice.

"Capital fellow—Jekyl!" exclaimed George; "he forgets nothing."

"He appears to be a most accomplished traveller," said Sir Stafford.

"And such a linguist!" said Sydney.

"And so amusing!" added my lady.

"And such a rogue!" muttered Dalton to himself, who, although so open to any imposition that took the form of flattery, could at once detect the knavery that was practised upon others, and who, at a glance, read the character of the new acquaintance.

"Don't you like the stir and excitement of the road, my dear child?" said Lady Hester to Kate, who, with very red eyes and very pale cheeks, stood in a window to avoid being observed. "There is something so adventurous about a journey always. One may be robbed, you know, or the carriage upset, as happened to ourselves t'other day; or mistaken for somebody else, and carried off to prison. It gives such a flurry to the spirits to think of these things, and a life of monotony is so very detestable."

Kate tried to smile an assent, and Lady Hester ran on in the same strain, extolling the delights of anything and everything that promised an excitement. "You know, my dear child, that this little place has almost been the death of me," added she. "I never was so bored in all my life; and I vow I shall detest a mill and a pine-forest to the last day I live. If it had not been for you and your sweet sister, I do not know what we should have done; but it's all over now. The dreary interval is passed, and when we turn the foot of that hill yonder, we shall have seen the last of it."

Kate's heart was almost bursting as she heard these words. To speak thus of the little valley would have been a profanation at any time, but to do so now, when she was about to leave it—when she was about to tear herself away from all the ties of love and affection, seemed an actual cruelty.

"Small places are my aversion," continued Lady Hester, who, when satisfied with her own talk, never cared much what effect it was producing upon others. "One grows down insensibly to the measure of a petty locality, with its little interests, its little people, and its little gossip—don't you think so, dear?"

"We were so happy here!" murmured Kate, in a voice that a choking fulness of her throat almost stifled.

"Of course you were, child—very happy; and it was

very good of you to be so. Yes, very good and very right." Here Lady Hester assumed a peculiar tone, which she always put on whenever she fancied that she was moralizing. "Natural amiability of disposition, and all that sort of thing, is very nice indeed; but there's luncheon, I see, and now, my dear, let us take our places without loss of time. George, will you give your arm to Miss Dalton? Mr. Dalton—but where's Mr. Dalton?"

"Papa has taken him with him to his dressing-room," answered Sydney, "but begged you'd not wait; they'll be back presently."

"No lady does wait at luncheon," said Lady Hester, snappishly, while, drawing Kate's arm within her own, she led her into the adjoining room.

The party had scarcely seated themselves at table when they were joined by Jekyl. Indeed, Lady Hester had only time to complain of his absence when he appeared; for it was a trick of that gentleman's tact merely to make himself sufficiently regretted not to be blamed. And now he came to say that everything was ready—the postilions in the saddle, the carriages drawn up before the door, the relays all been ordered along the road, the supper bespoken for the end of the journey. These pleasant facts he contrived to season with a running fire of little gossip and mimicry, in which the landlord, and Grégoire, and Mademoiselle Célestine were the individuals personated.

Never were Mr. Jekyl's peculiar abilities more in request; for the moment was an awkward and embarrassing one for all, and none, save himself, were able to relieve its seriousness. Even Nelly smiled at the witty sallies and playful conceits of this clever talker, and felt almost grateful to him for the momentary distraction he afforded her from gloomier thoughts. With such success did he exert himself, that all the graver sentiments of the occasion were swallowed up in the pleasant current of his small-talk, and no time given for a thought of that parting which was but a few minutes distant. Sir Stafford and Mr. Dalton were not sorry to discover the party in this pleasant humour, and readily chimed in with the gaiety around them.

The bugle of the postilions at length announced that "time was up," and the half-hour, which German politeness accords to leave-taking, expired. A dead silence succeeded the sound, and, as if moved by the same instinctive feeling, the two sisters arose and withdrew into a window. Close locked in each other's arms, neither could speak. Kate's thick sobs came fast and full, and her heart beat against her sister's side as though it were bursting. As for Nelly, all that she had meant to say, the many things she had kept for the last moment, were forgotten, and she could but press the wet cheek to her own, and murmur a tremulous blessing.

"Oh, if I could but remain with you, Nelly dearest," sobbed Kate; "I feel even already my isolation. Is it too late, sister dear, is it too late to go back?"

"Not if this be not a sudden impulse of sorrow for parting, Kate; not if you think you would be happier here."

"But papa! how will he—what will he——"

She had not time for more, when her father joined them. A certain flurry of his manner showed that he was excited by talking and wine together. There was that in the expression of his features, too, that betokened a mind ill at ease with itself—a restless alternating between two courses.

"'Tis you are the lucky girl, Kate," said he, drawing his arm around her, and pressing her to him. "This day's good luck pays me off for many a hard blow of fortune. They're kind people you are going with, real gentry, and our own blood into the bargain."

A thick heavy sob was all the answer she could make.

"To be sure you're sorry; why wouldn't you be sorry, leaving your own home and going away among strangers; and 'tis I am sorry to let you go."

"Are you so, dearest papa? Are you really sorry to part with me? Would you rather I'd stay behind with you and Nelly?" cried she, looking up at him with eyes swimming in tears.

"Would I, is it?" said he, eagerly, as he kissed her forehead twice; then, suddenly checking himself, he said, in an altered voice, "but that would be selfish, Kate.

nothing else than downright selfish. Ask Nelly, there, if that's my nature? Not that Nelly will ever give me too good a character!" added he, bitterly. But poor Ellen neither heard the question nor the taunt; her mind was travelling many a long mile away in realms of dreary speculation.

"I'm sorry to interrupt a moment like this," said Sir Stafford, "but I believe I must take you away, Miss Dalton; our time is now of the shortest."

One fond and long embrace the sisters took, and Kate was led away between Sir Stafford and her father, while Nelly went through a round of leave-takings with the others in a state of semi-consciousness that resembled a dream. The courteous flatteries of Lady Hester fell as powerless on her ear as the rougher good wishes of Grounsell. George Onslow's respectful manner was as unnoticed as the flippant smartness of Albert Jekyl's. Even Sydney's gentle attempt at consolation was heard without heeding; and when one by one they had gone and left her alone in that dreary room, she was not more aware of her solitude than when they stood around her.

Couriers and waiters passed in and out to see that nothing had been forgotten; doors were slammed on every side; loud voices were calling; all the turmoil of a departure was there, but she knew nothing of it. Even when the loud cracking of the postilions' whips echoed in the courtyard, and the quick clatter of horses' feet and heavy wheels resounded through the arched doorway, she was still unmoved; nor did she recover full liberty of thought till her father stood beside her, and said, "Come, Nelly, let us go home."

Then she arose, and took his arm without a word. She would have given her life to have been able to speak even a few words of comfort to the poor old man, whose cheeks were wet with tears, but she could not utter a syllable.

"Ay, indeed," muttered he, "it will be a dreary home now."

Not another word was spoken by either as they trod their way along the silent streets, over which the coming gloom of evening threw a mournful shadow. They

walked, with bent-down heads, as if actually fearing to recognize the objects that they had so often looked upon with *her*, and, slowly traversing the little Platz, they gained their own door. There they halted, and, from habit, pulled the bell. Its little tinkle, heard in the stillness, seemed suddenly to recall them both to thought, for Dalton, with a melancholy smile, said,—

"'Tis old Andy is coming now! 'Tisn't *her* foot I hear! Oh, Nelly, Nelly, how did you ever persuade me to this! Sure, I know I'll never be happy again!"

Nelly made no answer. The injustice of the speech was well atoned for in her mind by the thought that, in shifting the blame from himself to her, her father might find some sort of consolation; well satisfied to become the subject of his reproach, if the sacrifice could alleviate his sorrow.

"Take that chair away; throw it out of the window," cried he, angrily; "it breaks my heart to look at it." And with this he leaned his head upon the table, and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER XX.

A VERY SMALL "INTERIOR."

In one of the most favoured spots of that pleasant quay which goes by the name of the Lungo l'Arno, at Florence, there stood a small, miserable-looking, rickety old building, of two stories high, wedged in between two massive and imposing palaces, as though a buffer to deaden the force of collision. In all probability it owed its origin to some petty usurpation, and had gradually grown up, from the unobtrusive humility of a cobbler's bulk, to the more permanent nuisance of stone and mortar. The space occupied was so small as barely to permit of a door and a little window beside it, within which hung a variety of bridles, halters, and such-like gear, with here and there the brass-mounted harnessing of a Calasina, or the gay worsted tassels and fringed finery of a peasant's Barroccino. The little spot was so completely crammed with wares, that for all purposes of traffic it was useless; hence, everything that pertained to sale was carried on in the street, thus contributing by another ingredient to the annoyance of this misplaced residence. Threats, tyranny, bribery, seductions of twenty kinds, intimidation in as many shapes, had all failed in inducing its owner to remove to another part of the town. Gigi—every one in Florence is known by his Christian name, and we never heard him called by any other—resisted oppressions as manfully as he was proof against softer influences, and held his ground, hammering away at his old "demi-piques," burnishing bits and scouring housings, in utter indifference to the jarred nerves and chafed susceptibilities of his fine neighbours. It was not that the man was indifferent to money. It was not that the place was associated with any family reminiscences. It was not from its being very favourable

to the nature of his dealings, since his chief customers were usually the frequenters of the less fashionable localities. It was the simple fact that Gigi was a Florentine, and, like a Florentine, he saw no reason why he shouldn't have the sun and the Arno as well as the Guiciardoni, who lived at his right, or the Rinuncini, who dwelt on his left hand.

Small and contracted as that miserable frontage was, the sun *did* shine upon it just as pleasantly as on its proud neighbours, and the bright Arno glided by with its laughing ripples; while, from the little window above stairs, the eye ranged over the cypress-clad hill of San Miniato and the fair gardens of the Boboli. On one side lay the quaint old structure of the Ponte Vecchio, with its glittering stores of jewellery, and on the other the graceful elliptic arches of St. Trinita spanned the stream. The quay before the door was the chosen rallying-point of all Florence; the promenade where lounged all its fashionables of an evening, as they descended from their carriages after the accustomed drive in the Cascini. The Guardie Nobili passed daily, in all their scarlet bravery, to and from the Pitti Palace; the Grand Ducal equipage never took any other road. A continual flow of travellers to the great hotels on the quay contributed its share of bustle and animation to the scene; so that here might be said to meet, as in a focus, all that made up the life, the stir, and the movement of the capital.

Full of amusement and interest as that morning panorama often is, our object is less to linger beside it, than, having squeezed our way between the chaotic wares of Gigi's shop, to ascend the little, dark, and creaking stairs which leads to the first story, and into which we now beg to introduce our reader. There are but two rooms, each of them of the dimensions of closets, but furnished with a degree of pretension that cannot fail to cause amazement as you enter. Silk draperies, carved cabinets, bronzes, china, chairs of ebony, tables of buhl, a Persian rug on the floor, an alabaster lamp suspended from the ceiling, miniatures in handsome frames, and armour, cover the walls; while, scattered about, are richly-bound books, and prints, and drawings in water-colour. Through

the half-drawn curtain that covers the doorway—for there is no door—you can peep into the back room, where a lighter and more modern taste prevails; the gold-sprigged curtains of a French bed, and the Bohemian glass that glitters everywhere, bespeaking another era of decorative luxury.

It is not with any invidious pleasure for depreciation, but purely in the interests of truth, that we must now tell our reader that, of all this seeming elegance and splendour, nothing—absolutely nothing—is real. The brocaded silks have been old petticoats; the ebony is lacquer; the ivory is bone; the statuettes are plaster, glazed so as to look like marble; the armour is *papier mâché*—even to the owner himself, all is imposition, for he is no other than Albert Jekyl.

Now, my dear reader, you and I see these things precisely in the same light; the illusion of a first glance stripped off, we smile as we examine, one by one, the ingenious devices meant to counterfeit ancient art or modern elegance. It is possible, too, that we derive as much amusement from the ingenuity exercised, as we should have had pleasure in contemplating the realities so typified. Still there is one individual to whom this consciousness brings no alloy of enjoyment—Jekyl has persuaded himself to accept all as fact. Like the Indian, who first carves and then worships his god, he has gone through the old process of fabrication, and now gazes on his handiwork with the eyes of a true believer. Gracefully reclined upon an ottoman, the mock amber mouthpiece of a gilt hooka between his lips, he dreams, with half-closed eyes, of Oriental luxury! A Sybarite in every taste, he has invented a little philosophy of his own. He has seen enough of life to know that thousands might live in enjoyment out of the superfluities of rich men, and yet make them nothing the poorer. What banquet would not admit of a guest the more? What fête to which another might not be added? What four-in-hand prances by without some vacant seat, be it even in the rumble? What gilded gondola has not a place to spare? To be this "complement" to the world's want is then his mission.

No man invents a *métier* without a strong element of

success. The very creative power is an earnest of victory. It is true that there had been great men before Agamemnon; so had there been a race of "diners-out" before Jekyl; but he first reduced the practice to system, showing that all the triumphs of cookery, all the splendour of equipage, all the blandishments of beauty, all the fascinations of high society, may be enjoyed by one who actually does not hold a "share in the company," and, without the qualification of scrip, takes his place among the directors.

Had he brought to this new profession common place abilities and inferior acquirements, he would have been lost amid that vulgar herd of indistinguishables which infest every city, and whose names are not even "writ in water." Jekyl, however, possessed many and varied gifts. He might have made a popular preacher in a watering-place; a very successful doctor for nervous invalids; a clever practitioner at the bar; an admirable member of the newspaper press. He might have been very good as an actor; he would have been glorious as an auctioneer! With qualities of this order, a most plastic wit, and an india-rubber conscience, what bound need there be to his success! Nor was there. He was, in all the society of the capital, not alone an admitted and accepted, but a welcome guest. He might have failed to strike this man as being clever, or that as being agreeable. Some might be disappointed in his smartness; some might think his social claims overrated; none were ever offended by anything that fell from him. His great secret seemed to lie in the fact that, if generally easy to be found when required, he was never in the way when not wanted. Had he possessed the gift of invisibility, he could scarcely have been more successful in this latter good quality. He never interrupted a confidence; never marred a *téte-à-téte;* a kind of instinct would arrest his steps as he approached a boudoir where his presence would be undesirable; and he has been known to retire from a door on which he had already placed his hand, with a sudden burst of intelligence suggesting "to come another day."

These, however, seem mere negative qualities; his positive ones were, however, not less remarkable. The faculties

which some men might have devoted to abstract science or metaphysical inquiry, he, with a keen perception of his own fitness, resolved to exercise upon the world around him. His botany was a human classification, all his chemistry an analysis of men's motives. It is true, perhaps, that the poet's line may have been received by him with a peculiar limitation, and that, if "the proper study of mankind is man," his investigations took a shape scarcely contemplated by the writer. It was not man in his freedom of thought and action, not man in all the consciousness of power, and in the high hope of a great destiny that attracted him—no! it was for small humanity that he cared—for all the struggles, and wiles, and plots, and schemings of this wicked world—for man amid its pomps and vanities, its balls, its festivals, its intrigues, and its calamities.

He felt, with the great dramatist, that "all the world's a stage," and, the better to enjoy the performance, he merely took a "walking character," that gave him full leisure to watch the others. Such was our friend Albert Jekyl, or, as he was popularly called by his acquaintance, Le Duc de Dine-out, to distinguish him from the Talleyrands, who are Ducs de Dino.

Let us now, without further speculation, come back to him, as with his window open to admit the "Arno sun," he lay at full length upon his ottoman, conning over his dinner list. He had been for some time absent from Florence, and in the interval a number of new people had arrived, and some of the old had gone away. He was, therefore, running over the names of the present and the missing, with a speculative thought for the future.

"A bad season, it would seem!" muttered he, as his eye traced rapidly the list of English names, in which none of any distinction figured. "This comes of Carbonari and Illuminati humbug. They frighten John Bull, and he will not come abroad to see a barricade under his window. Great numbers have gone away too—the Scotts, the Carringdons, the Hopleys!—three excellent houses; and those dear Milnwoods, who, so lately 'reconciled to Rome,' as the phrase is, 'took out their piety' in Friday fish-dinners.

"The Russians, too, have left us; the Geroboffskys gone

back to their snows again, and expiating their 'liberal tendencies' by a tour in Siberia. The Chaptowitsch, recalled in disgrace for asking one of Louis Philippe's sons to a breakfast! We have got in exchange a few Carlists, half a dozen 'Legitimists,' with very stately manners and small fortunes. But a good house to dine at, a good *salon* for a lounge, a pleasant haunt for all seasons and at all hours, what is there? Nothing, absolutely nothing. And what a city this was once!—crammed, as it used to be, with dear, delightful 'ruined families;' that is, those who left ruin to their creditors at home, to come out and live gloriously abroad. And now I look down my list, and, except my little Sunday dinner at 'Marescotte's,' and that half-luncheon thing I take at the Villa Pessarole, I really see nothing for the whole week. The Onslows, alone, figure in strong capitals. Let me see, then, how they must be treated. I have already housed them at the Palazzo Mazzarini, and, for some days at least, their time will be filled up with upholsterers, decorators, and such-like. Then the campaign will open, and I can but watch eventualities, and there will be no lack of these. The young Guardsman likes play. I must see that Prince Carini does not get hold of him. Miss Onslow has a taste for Gothic and stained glass; that, now-a-days, often ends in a love of saints' shin-bones and other relics. My lady is disposed to be a 'fast one;' and, in fact, except the gruff old doctor, who is a confounded bore, the whole craft is deficient in ballast. But I was forgetting 'the Dalton'—shame on me, for she is very pretty indeed!" He seemed to ruminate and reflect for some minutes, and then said aloud, "Yes, ma belle Catharine, with the aid of Albert Jekyl, with *his* counsel to guide, and *his* head to direct you, there's no saying what your destiny might not be! It would be, I know well, very hard to convince you of the fact, and possibly were I to try it you'd be silly enough to fancy me in love with you!" Albert Jekyl in love! The idea was so excellent that he lay back and laughed heartily at it. "And yet," said he, after a pause, "you'll see this fact aright one of these days. You'll learn the immense benefit my knowledge would be when joined to your own beauty. Ay,

Kate! but it will be too late—just so, too late; then, like every one else, you'll have played all your trumps before you begin to learn the game. A girl who has caught up every trick of manner, every little tactic of society within a month, and who, at this hour, would stand the scrutiny of the most fastidious eye, is a great prize in the wheel. This aptitude might lead to great things, though, in all probability, it will never conduce save to very little ones!"

With this reflection Jekyl arose to begin his toilet, an occupation which, less from dandyism than pure self-love, he usually prolonged during the whole morning. It was to him a period of self-examination. He seemed—to use a mercantile figure—to be taking stock of his own capabilities, and investigating his own means of future success. It was an "open day"—that is, he knew not where he should dine; so that his costume, while partaking of all the characteristics of the morning, had yet combined certain little decorative traits that would not be unsuitable if pressed to accept an unpremeditated hospitality.

There were very few indeed with whom Jekyl would have condescended so to dine, not only from the want of dignity incurred, but that on principle he would have preferred the humblest fare at home to the vulgarity of a pot-luck dinner, which invariably, as he said himself, deranged your digestion, and led to wrong intimacies.

His dress being completed, he looked out along the crowd to see in whose carriage he was to have a seat to the Cascini. More than one inviting gesture motioned him to a place, as equipage after equipage passed on; but although some of those who sought him were high in rank, and others distinguished for beauty and attraction, Jekyl declined the courtesies with that little wave of the hand so significative in all Italian intercourse. Occasionally, indeed, a bland, regretful smile seemed to convey the sorrow the refusal cost him; and once he actually placed his hand over where his heart might be, as though to express a perfect pang of suffering; but still he bided his time.

At last, a very dark visage, surrounded by a whisker of blackest hair, peeped from beneath the head of a very

shabby calèche, whose horse and coachman were all of the "seediest," and Jekyl cried out, "Morlache!" while he made a sign towards the Cascini. The other replied by spreading out his hand horizontally from his mouth, and blowing along the surface—a pantomime meant to express a railroad. Jekyl immediately descended and took his place beside him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAMILY PICTURE.

THE fashionable life of a great city has a character of sameness which defies all attempts at portraiture. Well-bred people, and their amusements, are all constructed so perfectly alike—certain family traits pervading them throughout—that every effort at individualization is certain to be a failure. You may change the *venue*, if you will, from London to Paris, to Vienna, or St. Petersburg, but the issue is always the same; the very same interests are at work, and the same passions exercised, by the self-same kind of people. If such be the rule among the first-rate capitals of Europe, it is very far from being the case in those smaller cities which belong to inferior states, and which, from reasons of health, pleasure, or economy, are the resort of strangers from different parts of the world. In these, society is less disciplined, social rank less defined; conflicting claims and rival nationalities disturb the scene, and there is, so to say, a kind of struggle for pre-eminence, which in better regulated communities is never witnessed. If, as is unquestionably true, such places rarely present the attractions of good society, they offer to the mere observer infinitely more varied and amusing views of life than he would ever ex-

pect to see elsewhere. As in the few days of a revolution, when the "barricades are up," and all hurrying to the conflict, more of national character will be exhibited than in half a century of tame obedience to the law; so here are displayed, to the sun and the noonday, all those passions and pretensions which rarely see the light in other places.

The great besetting sin of this social state is the taste for NOTORIETY. Everything must contribute to this! Not alone wealth, splendour, rank, and genius, but vice, in all its shapes and forms, must be notorious. "Better be calumniated in all the moods and tenses than untalked of," is the grand axiom. Do something that can be reported of you; good, if you will—bad, if you must; but do it. If you be not rich enough to astonish by the caprices of your wealth, do something by your wits, or even your whiskers. The colour of a man's gloves has sufficed to make his fortune.

Upon this strange ocean, which, if rarely storm-shaken, was never perfectly tranquil, the Onslows were now launched, as well pleased as people usually are who, from being of third or fourth-rate importance in their own country, suddenly awake to the fact that they are celebrities abroad.

The Mazzarini Palace had long been untenanted; its last occupant had been one of the Borghese family, whose princely fortune was still unable to maintain the splendour of a residence fitted only for royalty. To learn, therefore, that a rich "milordo" had arrived there with the intention of passing his winter, was a piece of news that occupied every tongue in the city. Gossips were questioned about the private history, the peerage consulted for such facts as were public. Sir Stafford's wealth was actively discussed, and all possible inroads upon it his son's extravagance might have made debated and decided on. A minute investigation into their probable reasons for leaving England was also instituted, in which conjectures far more ingenious than true figured prominently. What they were like—what they said, did, and meant to do—was the sole table-talk of the capital.

"They've had their horses out from England," said

one; "They've taken the best box at the Pergola," said another; "They've engaged Midchekoff's cook," said a third; "They've been speaking to Gridani about his band," chimed in a fourth; and so on. All their proceedings were watched and followed by that eager vulturehood which hungers for ortolans, and thirsts for iced champagne.

Nor were the Onslows without offering food for this curious solicitude. From the hour of her arrival, Lady Hester had been deeply engaged, in concert with her grand vizier, Albert Jekyl, in preparations for the coming campaign. An army of upholsterers, decorators, and such-like, beset the Palazzo with enormous vans crammed full of wares. Furniture, that had served royal guests, and was even yet in high preservation, was condemned, to give way to newer and more costly decoration; rich stuffs and hangings, that had been the admiration of many a visitor, were ruthlessly pulled down, to be replaced by even more gorgeous materials; till at last it was whispered about, that, except some antique cabinets, the pictures, and a few tables of malachite or marble, little or nothing remained of what once constituted the splendour of the place.

These were mere rumours, however, for as yet none, save Albert Jekyl himself, had seen the interior; and from him, unless disposed to accord it, all confidence was hopeless. Indeed, his little vague stare when questioned —his simpering, "I shouldn't wonder," "It is very likely," or, "Now that you mention it, I begin to think so too," would have disarmed the suspicion of all who had not studied him deeply. What the Onslows were going to do, and when they would do it, were, then, the vexed questions of every coterie. In a few days more the Carnival would begin, and yet no announcement of their intentions had yet gone forth—no programme of future festivities been issued to the world. A vague and terrible fear began to prevail that it was possible they meant all these splendid preparations for themselves alone. Such a treason was incredible at first; but as day followed day, and no sign was made, suspicion ripened into actual dread; and now, the eager expectants began to whisper

among themselves dark reasons for a conduct so strange and inexplicable.

Haggerstone contributed his share to these mysterious doubtings, for, while not confessing that his acquaintance with the Onslows was of the very slightest, and dated but from a week before, he spoke of them with all the affected ease and information of one who had known them for years.

Nor were his comments of the most flattering kind, for seeing how decidedly every effort he made to renew acquaintance was met by a steady opposition, he lost no time in assuming his stand as enemy. The interval of doubt which had occurred as to their probable mode of life was favourable for this line of action. None knew if they were ever to partake of the splendour and magnificence of the Mazzarini; none could guess what chance they had of the sumptuous banquets of the rich man's table. It was a lottery, in which, as yet, they had not even a ticket, and what so natural as to depreciate the scheme.

If the courts of law and equity be the recognized tribunals by which the rights of property are decided, so there exists in every city certain not less decisive courts, which pronounce upon all questions of social claims, and deliver judgments upon the pretensions of every new arrival amongst them. High amid the number of these was a certain family called Ricketts, who had been residents of Florence for thirty-odd years back. They consisted of three persons—General Ricketts, his wife, and a maiden sister of the General. They inhabited a small house in a garden within the boulevard, dignified by the name of the "Villino Zoe." It had originally been the humble residence of a market-gardener, but, by the aid of paint and plaster, contrived to impose upon the world almost as successfully as did the fair owner herself by the help of similar adjuncts. A word, however, for the humanities before we speak of their abiding-place. The "General" —Heaven alone knew when, where, or in what service he became so—was a small, delicate little man, with bland manners, a weak voice, a weak stomach, and a weaker head; his instincts all mild, gentle, and inoffensive, and his whole pursuit in life a passion for inventing fortifica-

tions, and defending passes and *têtes-du-pont* by lines, circumvallations, and ravelins, which cost reams of paper and whole buckets of water-colour to describe. The only fire which burned within his nature was a little flickering flame of hope, that one day the world would awake to the recognition of his great discoveries, and his name be associated with those of Vauban and Carnot. Sustained by this, he bore up against contemporary neglect and actual indifference; he whispered to himself, that, like Nelson, he would one day "have a gazette of his own," and in this firm conviction, he went on with rule and compass, measuring and daubing and drawing from morn till night, happy, humble, and contented: nothing could possibly be more inoffensive than such an existence. Even the French—our natural enemies—or the Russians—our Palmerstonian *Bêtes noires*,—would have forgiven, had they but seen, the devices of his patriotism. Never did heroic ardour burn in a milder bosom, for, though his brain revelled in all the horrors of siege and slaughter, he would not have had the heart to crush a beetle.

Unlike him in every respect was the partner of his joys: a more bustling, plotting, scheming existence it was hard to conceive. Most pretenders are satisfied with aspiring to one crown; *her* ambitions were "legion." When Columbus received the taunts of the courtiers on the ease of his discovery, and merely replied, that the merit lay simply in the fact that he alone had made it, he was uttering a truth susceptible of very wide application. Nine-tenths of the inventions which promote the happiness or secure the ease of mankind have been not a whit more difficult than that of balancing the egg. They only needed that some one should think of them "practically." Thousands may have done so in moods of speculation or fancy; the grand requisite was a practical intelligence. Such was Mrs. Ricketts's. As she had seen at Naples the lava used for mere road-making, which in other hands, and by other treatment, might have been fashioned into all the shapes and colours of Bohemian glass, so did she perceive that a certain raw material was equally misapplied and devoted to base uses, but which, by the touch of genius, might be made powerful as the wand of an en-

chanter. This was "Flattery." Do not, like the Spanish courtiers, my dear reader—do not smile at her discovery, nor suppose that she had been merely exploring an old and exhausted mine. Her flattery was not, as the world employs it, an exaggerated estimate of existing qualities, but a grand poetic and creative power, that actually begot the great sublime it praised. Whatever your walk, rank, or condition in life, she instantly laid hold of it to entrap you. No matter what your size, stature, or symmetry, she could costume you in a minute! Her praises, like an elastic-web livery, fitted all her slaves; and slaves were they of the most abject slavery, who were led by the dictation of her crafty intelligence!

A word about poor Martha, and we have done; nor, indeed, is there any need we should say more than that she was universally known as "Poor Martha" by all their acquaintance. Oh! what patience, submission, and long-suffering it takes before the world will confer its degree of Martyr—before they will condescend to visit, even with so cheap a thing as compassion, the life of an enduring self-devotion. Martha had had but one idol all her life—her brother; and although, when he married late in years, she had almost died broken-hearted at the shock, she clung to him and his fortunes, unable to separate from one to whose habits she had been ministering for above thirty years. It was said that originally she was a person of good common faculties, and a reasonably fair knowledge of the world; but to see her at the time of which we now speak, not a vestige remained of either—not a stone marked where the edifice once stood. Nor can this be matter of wonderment. Who could have passed years amid all the phantasmagoria of that unreal existence, and either not gone clean mad, or made a weak compromise with sanity, by accepting everything as real? Poor Martha had exactly these two alternatives—either to "believe the crusts, mutton," or be eternally shut out from all hope. Who can tell the long and terrible struggle such a mind must have endured?—what little bursts of honest energy repelled by fear and timidity?—what good intentions baffled by natural humility, and the affection she bore her brother?

It may have—nay, it did—cost her much to believe this strange creed of her sister-in-law; but she ended by doing so. So implicit was her faith, that, like a true devotee, she would not trust the evidence of her own senses, if opposed by the articles of her belief. The very pictures at whose purchase she had been present, and whose restoration and relacquering had been the work of her own hands, she was willing to aver had been the gifts of royal and princely personages. The books for which she had herself written to the publishers, she would swear all tributes offered by the respective writers to the throne of taste and erudition. Every object with whose humble birth and origin she was familiar, was associated in her mind with some curious history, which, got off by rote, she repeated with full credulity. Like the well-known athlete, who lifted a bull because he had accustomed himself to the feat since the animal had been a calf, rising from small beginnings, she had so educated her faculties, that now nothing was above her powers. Not all the straits and contrivances by which this motley display was got up —not all the previous schemings and plottings—not all the discussions as to what King or Kaiser this should be attributed—by what artist that was painted—who carved this cup—who enamelled that vase—could shake the firmness of her faith when the matter was once decided. She might oppose the Bill in every stage; she might cavil at it in Committee, and divide on every clause; but when it once became law, she revered it as a statute of the land. All her own doubts faded away on the instant; all her former suggestions vanished at once; a new light seemed to break on her mind, and she appeared to see with the eyes of truth and discernment. We have been led away beyond our intention in this sketch, and have no space to devote to that temple wherein the mysteries were celebrated. Enough if we say that it was small and ill-arranged, its discomfort increased by the incongruous collection of rare and curious objects by which it was filled. Stuffed lions stood in the hall; mock men in armour guarded the entrance to the library; vast glass cases of mineralogical wealth, botanical specimens, stuffed birds, impaled butterflies, Indian weapons, Etrurian cups,

Irish antiquities, Chinese curiosities, covered the walls on every side. Not a specimen amongst them that could not trace its presentation to some illustrious donor. Miniatures of dear, dear friends everywhere; and what a catholic friendship was that which included every one, from Lord Byron to Chalmers, and took in the whole range of morals, from Mrs. Opie to Fanny Elssler. Indeed, although the fair Zoe was a "rigid virtue," her love of genius, her "mind-worship," as she called it, often led her into strange intimacies with that intellectual class whose strength lies in pirouettes, and whose gifts are short petticoats. In a word, whatever was "notorious" was her natural prey; a great painter, a great radical, a great basso, a great traveller; any one to lionize, anything to hang history upon; to enlist, even "for one night only," in that absurd comedy which was performed at her house, and to display among her acquaintances as another in that long catalogue of those who came to lay the tribute of their genius at her feet.

That a large section of society was disposed to be rude and ungenerous enough to think her a bore, is a fact that we are, however unwilling, obliged to confess; but her actual influence was little affected by the fact. The real serious business of life is often carried on in localities surrounded by innumerable inconveniences. Men buy and sell their millions, subsidize states, and raise loans in dens dark and dismal enough to be prison-cells. In the same way, the Villino was a recognized rendezvous of all who wanted to hear what was going on in the world, and who wished to be *à la hauteur* of every current scandal of the day. Not that such was ever the tone of the conversation; on the contrary, it was "all taste and the musical glasses," the "naughty talk" being the mere asides of the scene.

Now, in that season of foreign life which precedes the Carnival, and on those nights when there is no opera, any one benevolent enough to open his doors to receive is sure of full houses; so the Villino "improved the occasion," by announcing a series of Tuesdays and Fridays, which were, as the papers say, frequented by all the rank and fashion of the metropolis. It is at one of these "at

homes" that we would now present our reader—not, indeed, during the full moon of the reception, when the crowded rooms, suffocating with heat, were crammed with visitors, talking in every tongue of Europe, and every imaginable dialect of each. The great *mêlée* tournament was over, and a few lingered over the now empty lists, discussing in familiar converse the departed guests and the events of the evening.

This privy council consisted of the reader's old acquaintance, Haggerstone, a Russo-Polish Count Petrolaffski, a dark, sallow-skinned, odd-looking gentleman, whose national predilections had raised him to the rank of an enemy to the Emperor, but whose private resources, it was rumoured, came from the Imperial treasury to reward his services as a spy; a certain Mr. Scroope Purvis, the brother of Mrs. Ricketts, completing the party. He was a little, rosy-cheeked old man, with a limp and a stutter, perpetually running about retailing gossip, which, by some accident or other, he invariably got all wrong, never, on even the most trifling occasion, being able to record a fact as it occurred.

Such were the individuals of a group which sat around the fire in close and secret confab, Mrs. Ricketts herself placed in the midst, her fair proportions gracefully disposed in a chair whose embroidery displayed all the quarterings and emblazonment of her family for centuries back. The "Bill" before the house was the Onslows, whose *res gestæ* were causing a most intense interest everywhere.

"Have dey return your call, madam?" asked the Pole, with an almost imperceptible glance beneath his dark brows.

"Not yet, count; we only left our cards yesterday." This, be it said in parenthesis, was "inexact"—the visit had been made eight days before. "Nor should we have gone at all, but Lady Foxington begged and entreated we would. 'They will be so utterly without guidance of any kind,' she said, 'you must really take them in hand.'"

"And you will take dem in your hand—eh?"

"That depends, my dear count—that depends," said

she, pondering. "We must see what line they adopt here; rank and wealth have no influence with us if ununited with moral and intellectual excellence."

"I take it, then, your circle will be more select than amusing this winter," said Haggerstone, with one of his whip-cracking enunciations.

"Be it so, colonel," sighed she, plaintively. "Like a lone beacon on a rock, with——I forget the quotation."

"With the phos-phos-phos-phate of lime upon it?" said Purvis, "that new discov-co-covery?"

"With no such thing! A figure is, I perceive, a dangerous mode of expression."

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried he, with a peculiar cackle, whose hysteric notes always carried himself into the seventh heaven of enjoyment, "you would cut a pretty figure if you were to be made a beacon of, and be burned like Moses. Ha! ha! ha!"

The lady turned from him in disdain, and addressed the colonel.

"So you really think that they are embarrassed, and that is the true reason of their coming abroad?"

"I believe I may say I know it, ma'am!" rejoined he. "There is a kind of connection between our families, although I should be very sorry they'd hear of it—the Badelys and the Harringtons are first cousins."

"Oh, to be sure!" broke in Purvis. "Jane Harrington was father; no, no, not father—she was mo-mo-mother of Tom Badely; no! that isn't it, she was his aunt, or his brother-in-law, I forget which."

"Pray be good enough, sir, not to involve a respectable family in a breach of common law," said Haggerstone, tartly, "and leave the explanation to me."

"How I do dislike dat English habit of countin' cousins," said the Pole; "you never see tree, four English togeder without a leetle tree of genealogie in de middle, and dey do sit all round, fighting for de fruit."

"Financial reasons, then, might dictate retirement," said Mrs. Ricketts, coming back to the original theme.

A very significant nod from Haggerstone inferred that he concurred in the remark.

"Four contested elections for a connty, ma'am, a spend-

thrift wife, and a gambling son, rarely increase a man's income," said he, sententiously.

"Do he play? What for play is he fond of?" asked the Pole, eagerly.

"Play, sir? There is nothing an Englishman will not play at—from the turf, to tossing for sovereigns."

"So Hamlet say, in Shakspeare, 'de play is de ting,'" cried the count, with the air of a man who made a happy quotation.

"They are going to have plays," broke in Purvis; "Jekyl let it out to-night. They're going to get up a Vau-vau-vau-vau——"

"A *tête de veau*, probably, sir," said Haggerstone; "in which case," continued he, in a whisper, "you would be invaluable."

"No, it isn't that," broke in Purvis; "they are to have what they call Pro-verbs."

"I trust they have engaged your services as *Solomon*, sir," said Haggerstone, with that look of satisfaction which always followed an impudent speech.

"I heard the subject of one of them," resumed the other, who was far too occupied with his theme to bestow a thought upon a sarcasm. "There's a lady in love with —with—with her Mam-mam-mam——"

"Her mamma," suggested the Pole.

"No, it isn't her mamma; it's her Mam-ame-ameluke—her Mameluke slave; and he, who is a native prince, with a great many wives of his own——"

"Oh, for shame, Scroope, you forget Martha is here," said Mrs. Ricketts, who was always ready to suppress the bore by a call to order on the score of morals.

"It isn't wrong, I assure you; just hear me out; let me only explain——"

"There, pray don't insist, I beg you," said Mrs. Ricketts, with a regal wave of her hand.

"Why, it's Miss Dalton is to play it, Jekyl says," cried Purvis, in a tone of most imploring cadence.

"And who may Miss Dalton be?" asked Mrs. Ricketts.

"She is the niece—no, she's the aunt—or rather her father is aunt to—to——"

"He may be an old lady, sir; but, surely——"

"Oh, I have it now!" broke in Purvis. "It was her mother; Miss Da-a-alton's mother was uncle to a Stafford."

"Perhaps I can shorten the pedigree," said Haggerstone, tartly. "The young lady is the daughter of a man whom this same Sir Stafford tricked out of his fortune; they were distant relatives, so he hadn't even the plea of blood-relationship to cover his iniquity. It was, however, an Irish fortune, and, like a Spanish château, its loss is more a question of feeling than of fact. The lawyers still say that Dalton's right is unimpeachable, and that the Onslows have not even the shadow of a case for a jury."

"An' have de lady no broder nor sister?" asked the count, who had heard this story with much attention.

"She has, sir, both brother and sister, but both illegitimate, so that this girl is the heiress to the estate."

"And probably destined to be the wife of the young Guardsman," said Mrs. Ricketts.

"Guessed with your habitual perspicuity, madam," said Haggerstone, bowing.

"How very shocking! What worldliness one sees everywhere!" cried she, plaintively.

"The world is excessively worldly, madam," rejoined Haggerstone; "but I really believe that we are not a jot worse than were the patriarchs of old."

"Ah, oui, les patriarches!" echoed the Pole, laughing, and always ready to seize upon an allusion that savoured of irreverence.

"Count!—Colonel Haggerstone!" cried Mrs. Ricketts, in reproof, and with a look to where Martha sat at her embroidery-frame. "And this Miss Dalton—is she pretty?"

"She is pretty at this moment, madam; but, with a clever hairdresser and a good milliner, would be downright beautiful. Of course these are adjuncts she is little likely to find during her sojourn with the Onslows."

"Poor thing! how glad one would be to offer her a kinder asylum," said Mrs. Ricketts, while she threw her eyes over the cracked china monsters and mock Vandykes around her; "a home," added she, "where intellectuality

and refinement might compensate for the vulgar pleasures of mere wealth!"

"She may want such, one of these days, yet, or I'm much mistaken," said Haggerstone. "Onslow has got himself very deep in railway speculations; he has heavy liabilities in some Mexican mining affairs too. They've all been living very fast; and a crash—a real crash"—this word he gave with a force of utterance that only malignity could compass—"is almost certain to follow! What an excellent stable will come to the hammer then! There's a 'Bone-setter' colt worth a thousand guineas, with his engagements."

And now there was a little pause in the dialogue, while each followed out the thoughts of his own mind. Haggerstone's were upon the admirable opportunity of picking up a first-rate batch of horses for a fourth of their value; Mrs. Ricketts was pondering over the good policy of securing possession of a rich heiress as a member of her family, to be held in bondage as long as possible, and eventually—if it must be—given in marriage to some unprovided-for cousin; the Pole's dreams were of a rich wife; and Purvis, less ambitious than the rest, merely revelled in the thought of all the gossip this great event, when it should come off, would afford him; the innumerable anecdotes he would have to retail of the family and their wastefulness; the tea-parties he should enliven by his narratives; the soirées he would amuse with his sallies. Blessed gift of imbecility! how infinitely more pleasurable to its possessor than all the qualities and attributes of genius!

"Dat is ver pretty indeed, très jolie!" said the count, bestowing a look of approval at the embroidery-frame, whereupon, for eight mortal months, poor Martha laboured at the emblazonment of the Ricketts' arms; "de leetle dogs are as de life."

"They are tigers, Monsieur le Comte," replied she, modestly.

"Oh, pardon! dey are tigres!"

"Most puppies are somewhat tigerish now-a-days," chimed in Haggerstone, rising to take his leave.

„You are leaving us early, colonel," said the old gene-

ral, as he awoke from a long nap on the little corner sofa, which formed his resting-place.

"It is past two, sir; and, even in *your* society, one cannot cheat time." Then, having acquitted himself of his debt of impertinence, he wished them good night. The others, also, took their leave and departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

KATE.

LET us now return to Kate Dalton, whose life, since we last saw her, had been one round of brilliant enjoyment. To the pleasure of the journey, with all its varied objects of interest, the picturesque scenery of the Via Mala, the desolate grandeur of the Splugen, the calm and tranquil beauty of Como, succeeded the thousand treasures of art in the great cities where they halted. At first every image and object seemed associated by some invisible link with thoughts of home. What would Nelly think or say of this? was the ever-recurring question of her mind. How should she ever be able to treasure up her own memories and tell of the wonderful things that every moment met her eyes? The quick succession of objects, all new and dazzling, were but so many wonders to bring back to that "dear fireside" of home. The Onslows themselves, who saw everything without enthusiasm of any kind, appeared to take pleasure in the freshness of the young girl's admiration. It gave them, as it were, a kind of reflected pleasure, while, amid galleries and collections of all that was rare and curious, nothing struck them as half so surprising as the boundless delight of her unhackneyed nature.

Educated to a certain extent by watching the pursuits of her sister, Kate knew how to observe with taste, and admire with discrimination. Beauty of high order would seem frequently endowed with a power of appreciating the beauty of art—a species of relation appearing almost to subsist between the two.

Gifted with this instinct, there was an intensity in all her enjoyments, which displayed itself in the animation of her manner and the elevated expression of her features. The coldest and most worldly natures are seldom able to resist the influence of this enthusiasm; however hard the metal of their hearts, they must melt beneath this flame. Lady Hester Onslow, herself, could not remain insensible to the pure sincerity and generous warmth of this artless girl. For a time the combat, silent, unseen, but eventful, was maintained between these two opposite natures, the principle of good warring with the instincts of evil. The victory might have rested with the true cause—there was every prospect of its doing so—when Sydney Onslow, all whose sympathies were with Kate, and whose alliance had every charm of sisterhood, was suddenly recalled to England by tidings of her aunt's illness. Educated by her Aunt Conway, she had always looked up to her as a mother, nor did the unhappy circumstances of her father's second marriage tend to weaken this feeling of attachment. The sad news reached them at Genoa; and Sydney, accompanied by Dr. Grounsell, at once set out for London. If the sudden separation of the two girls, just at the very moment of a budding friendship, was sorrowfully felt by both, to Lady Hester the event was anything but unwelcome.

She never had liked Sydney; she now detested the notion of a step-daughter, almost of her own age, in the same society with herself; she dreaded, besides, the influence that she had already acquired over Kate, whose whole heart and nature she had resolved on monopolizing. It was not from any feeling of attachment or affection, it was the pure miser-like desire for possession that animated her. The plan of carrying away Kate from her friends and home had been her own; *she*, therefore, owned her; the original title was vested in her: the young girl's

whole future was to be in her hands; her "road in life" was to be at *her* dictation. To be free of Sydney and the odious doctor by the same event was a double happiness, which, in spite of all the decorous restraints bad news impose, actually displayed itself in the most palpable form.

The Palazzo Mazzarini was now to be opened to the world, with all the splendour wealth could bestow, untrammelled by any restriction the taste of Sydney or the prudence of the doctor might impose. Sir Stafford, ever ready to purchase quiet for himself at any cost of money, objected to nothing. The cheapness of Italy, the expectations formed of an Englishman, were the arguments which always silenced him if he ventured on the very mildest remonstrance about expenditure; and Jekyl was immediately called into the witness-box, to show that among the economies of the Continent, nothing was so striking as the facilities of entertaining. George, as might be supposed, had no dislike to see their own house the great centre of society, and himself the much sought-after and caressed youth of the capital.

As for Kate, pleasure came associated in her mind with all that could elevate and exalt it—refinement of manners, taste, luxury, the fascinations of wit, the glitter of conversational brilliancy. She had long known that she was handsome, but she had never felt it till now; never awoke to that thrilling emotion which whispers of power over others, and which elevates the possessor of a great quality into a species of petty sovereignty above their fellows. Her progress in this conviction was a good deal aided by her maid; for, at Jekyl's suggestion, a certain Mademoiselle Nina had been attached to her personal staff.

It was not easy at first for Kate to believe in the fact at all that she should have a peculiar attendant; nor was it without much constraint and confusion that she could accept of services from one whose whole air and bearing bore the stamp of breeding and tact. Mademoiselle Nina had been the maid of the Princess Menzikoff, the most distinguished belle of Florence, the model of taste and elegance in dress; but when the Princess separated from her husband, some unexplained circumstances had involved

the name of the *femme de chambre*, so that, instead of "exchanging without a difference," as a person of her great abilities might readily have done, she had disappeared for a while from the scene and sphere in which habitually she moved, and only emerged from her seclusion to accept the humble position of Kate Dalton's maid. She was a perfect type of her own countrywomen in her own class of life. Small and neatly formed, her head was too large for her size, and the forehead over-large for the face, the brows and temples being developed beyond all proportion; her eyes, jet black and deeply set, were cold, stern-looking, and sleepy, sadness, or rather weariness, being the characteristic expression of the face. Her mouth, however, when she smiled, relieved this, and gave a look of softness to her features. Her manner was that of great distance and respect—the trained observance of one who had been always held in the firm hand of discipline, and never suffered to assume the slightest approach to a liberty. She contrived, however, even in her silence, or in the very few words she ever uttered, to throw an air of devotion into her service that took away from the formality of a manner that at first seemed cold and even repulsive. Kate, indeed, in the beginning, was thrown back by the studied reserve and deferential distance she observed; but as days went over, and she grew more accustomed to the girl's manner, she began to feel pleased with the placid and unchanging demeanour, that seemed to bespeak a mind admirably trained and regulated to its own round of duties.

While Kate sat at a writing-table adding a few lines to that letter which, began more than a week ago, was still far from being completed, Nina, whose place was beside the window, worked away with bent-down head, not seeming to have a thought save for the occupation before her. Not so Kate: fancies came and went at every instant, breaking in upon the tenor of her thoughts, or wending far away on errands of speculation. Now, she would turn her eye from the page to gaze in wondering delight at the tasteful decorations of her little chamber—a perfect gem of elegance in all its details; then she would start up to step out upon the terrace, where even in winter the

Kate and Nona.

orange-trees were standing, shedding their sweet odour at every breeze from the Arno; with what rapturous delight she would follow the windings of that bright river, till it was lost in the dark woods of the Cascini! How the sounds of passing equipages, the glitter and display of the moving throng, stirred her heart, and then, as she turned back within the room, with what a thrill of ecstasy her eyes rested on the splendid ball-dress which Nina had just laid upon the sofa! With a trembling hand she touched the delicate tissue of Brussels lace, and placed it over her arm in a graceful fold, her cheek flushing and her chest heaving in consciousness of heightening beauty.

Nina's head was never raised, her nimble fingers never ceased to ply, but beneath her dark brows her darker eyes shot forth a glance of deep and subtle meaning, as she watched the young girl's gesture.

"Nina," cried she, at last, "it is much too handsome for me; although I love to look at it, I actually fear to wear it. You know I never have worn anything like this before."

"Mademoiselle is too diffident and too unjust to her own charms; beautiful as is the robe, it only suits the elegance of its wearer."

"One ought to be so graceful in every gesture, so perfect in every movement beneath folds like these," cried Kate, still gazing at the fine tracery.

"Mademoiselle is grace itself!" said she, in a low, soft voice, so quiet in its utterance that it sounded like a reflection uttered unconsciously.

"Oh, Nina! if I were so! If I only could feel that my every look and movement were not recalling the peasant girl; for, after all, I have been little better—our good blood could not protect us from being poor, and poverty means so much that lowers!"

Nina sighed, but so softly as to be inaudible, and Kate went on:—

"My sister Nelly never thought so; she always felt differently. Oh! Nina, how you would love her if you saw her, and how you would admire her beautiful hair, and those deep blue eyes, so soft, so calm, and yet so meaning."

Nina looked up, and seemed to give a glance that implied assent.

"Nelly would be so happy here, wandering through these galleries and sitting for hours long in those beautiful churches, surrounded with all that can elevate feeling or warm imagination; she, too, would know how to profit by these treasures of art. The frivolous enjoyments that please me would be beneath her. Perhaps she would teach me better things; perhaps I might turn from mere sensual pleasure to higher and purer sources of happiness."

"Will mademoiselle permit me to try this wreath?" said Nina, advancing with a garland of white roses, which she gracefully placed around Kate's head.

A half cry of delight burst from Kate as she saw the effect in the glass.

"Beautiful, indeed!" said Nina, as though in concurrence with an unspoken emotion.

"But, Nina, I scarcely like this—it seems as though—I cannot tell what I wish—as though I would desire notice—I, that am nothing—that ought to pass unobserved."

"You, mademoiselle," cried Nina—and for the first time a slight warmth colouring the tone of her manner—"you, mademoiselle—the belle, the beauty, the acknowledged beauty of Florence!"

"Nina! Nina!" cried Kate, rebukingly.

"I hope mademoiselle will forgive me. I would not for the world fail in my respect," said Nina, with deep humility; "but I was only repeating what others spoke."

"I am not angry, Nina—at least, not with you," said Kate, hurriedly. "With myself, indeed, I'm scarcely quite pleased. But who could have said such a silly thing?"

"Every one, mademoiselle; every one, as they were standing beneath the terrace t'other evening. I overheard Count Labinski say it to Captain Onslow; and then my lady took it up, and said, 'You are quite right, gentlemen; there is nothing that approaches her in beauty.'"

"Nina! dear Nina!" said Kate, covering her flushed face with both hands.

"The Count de Melzi was more enthusiastic than even

the rest. He vowed that he had grown out of temper with his Raffaelles since he saw you."

A hearty burst of laughter from Kate told that this flattery, at least, had gone too far. And now she resumed her seat at the writing-table. It was of the Splugen Pass and Como she had been writing; of the first burst of Italy upon the senses, as, crossing the High Alps, the land of the terraced vine lay stretched beneath. She tried to fall back upon the memory of that glorious scene as it broke upon her; but it was in vain. Other and far different thoughts had gained the mastery. It was no longer the calm lake, on whose mirrored surface snow-peaks and glaciers were reflected,—it was not of those crags, over which the wild-fig and the olive, the oleander and the mimosa, are spreading, she could think. Other images crowded to her brain; troops of admirers were before her fancy; the hum of adulation filled her ears; splendid *salons*, resounding with delicious music, and a-blaze with a thousand wax-lights, rose before her imagination, and her heart swelled with conscious triumph. The transition was most abrupt, then, from a description of scenery and natural objects to a narrative of the actual life of Florence:—

"Up to this, Nelly, we have seen no one, except Mr. Jekyl, whom you will remember as having met at Baden. He dines here several days every week, and is most amusing with his funny anecdotes and imitations, for he knows everybody, and is a wonderful mimic. You'd swear Doctor Grounsell was in the next room if you heard Mr. Jekyl's imitation. There has been some difficulty about an opera-box, for Mr. Jekyl, who manages everybody, will insist upon having Prince Midchekoff's, which is better than the royal box, and has not succeeded. For this reason we have not yet been to the Opera; and, as the Palace has been undergoing a total change of decoration and furniture, there has been no reception here as yet; but on Tuesday we are to give our first ball. All that I could tell you of splendour, my dearest Nelly, would be nothing to the reality of what I see here. Such magnificence in every detail; such troops of servants, all so respectful and obliging, and some dressed in liveries that resemble

handsome uniforms! Such gold and silver plate! such delicious flowers everywhere—on the staircase, in the drawing-room—here, actually, beside me as I write! And, oh! Nelly, if you could see my dress! Lace, with bouquets of red camellia, and looped up with strings of small pearls. Think of *me*, of poor Kate Dalton, wearing such splendour! And, strange enough, too, I do not feel awkward in it. My hair, that you used to think I dressed so well myself, has been pronounced a perfect horror; and although I own it did shock me at first to hear it, I now see that they were perfectly right. Instead of bands, I wear ringlets down to my very shoulders; and Nina tells me there never was such an improvement, as the character of my features requires softening. Such quantities of dress as I have got, too! for there is endless toilette here; and although I am now growing accustomed to it, at first it worried me dreadfully, and left me no time to read. And, *à propos* of reading, Lady Hester has given me such a strange book. 'Mathilde,' it is called—very clever, deeply interesting, but not the kind of reading you would like; at least, neither the scenes nor the characters such as you would care for. Of course I take it to be a good picture of life in another sphere from what I have seen myself; and if it be, I must say there is more vice in high society than I believed. One trait of manners, however, I cannot help admiring—the extreme care that every one takes never to give even the slightest offence; not only that the wrong thing is never said, but never even suggested; such an excessive deference to others' feelings bespeaks great refinement, if not a higher and better quality. Lady Hester is delightful in this respect. I cannot tell you how the charm of her manner grows into a fascination. Captain Onslow I see little of, but he is always good-humoured and gay; and as for Sir Stafford, he is like a father in the kindliness and affection of his cordiality. Sydney I miss greatly; she was nearly of my own age, and although so much superior to me in every way, so companionable and sister-like. We are to write to each other if she does not return soon. I intended to have said so much about the galleries, but Mr. Jekyl does quiz so dreadfully about artistic enthusiasm, I am actually ashamed to say a word;

besides, to me, Nelly, beautiful pictures impart pleasure less from intrinsic merit than from the choice of subject and the train of thoughts they originate; and for this reason I prefer Salvator Rosa to all other painters. The romantic character of his scenery, the kind of story that seems to surround his characters, the solemn tranquillity of his moonlights, the mellow splendour of his sunsets, actually heighten one's enjoyment of the realities in nature. I am ashamed to own that Raffaelle is less my favourite than Titian, whose portraits appear to reveal the whole character and life of the individual represented. In Velasquez there is another feature——" Here came an interruption, for Nina came with gloves to choose, and now arose the difficult decision between a fringe of silver filigree and a deep fall of Valenciennes lace—a question on both sides of which Mademoiselle Nina had much to say. In all these little discussions, the mock importance lent to mere trifles at first amused Kate, and even provoked her laughter; but, by degrees, she learned not only to listen to them with attention, but even to take her share in the consultation. Nina's great art lay in her capacity for adapting a costume to the peculiar style and character of the wearer, and, however exaggerated were some of her notions on this subject, there was always a sufficiency of shrewd sense and good taste in her remarks to overbear any absurdity in her theory. Kate Dalton, whose whole nature had been simplicity and frankness itself, was gradually brought to assume a character with every change of toilette; for if she came down to breakfast in a simple robe of muslin, she changed it for a *costume de paysanne* to walk in the garden; and this again for a species of hunting-dress to ride in the Cascini —to appear afterwards at dinner in some new type of a past age. An endless variety of these devices at last engaging attention, and occupying time, to the utter exclusion of topics more important and interesting.

The letter was now to be resumed; but the clue was lost, and her mind was only fettered with topics of dress and toilette. She walked out upon the terrace to recover her composure; but beneath the window was rolling on that endless tide of people and carriages that swells up

the great flood of a capital city. She turned her steps to another side, and there, in the pleasure-ground, was George Onslow, with a great horse-sheet round him, accustoming a newly-purchased Arabian to the flapping of a riding-skirt. It was a present Sir Stafford had made her the day before. Everything she saw, everything she heard, recalled but one image—herself! The intoxication of this thought was intense. Life assumed features of delight and pleasure she had never conceived possible before. There was an interest imparted to everything, since in everything she had her share. Oh! most insidious of all poisons is that of egotism, which lulls the conscience by the soft flattery we whisper to ourselves, making us to believe that we are such as the world affects to think us. How ready are we to take credit for gifts that have been merely lent us by a kind of courtesy, and of which we must make restitution, when called upon, with what appetite we may.

For the time, indeed, the ecstasy of this delusion is boundless! Who has not, at some one moment or other of his life, experienced the entrancing delight of thinking that the world is full of his friends and admirers, that good wishes follow him as he goes, and kind welcomes await his coming? Much of our character for good or evil, of our subsequent utility in life, or our utter helplessness, will depend upon how we stand the season of trial. Kate Dalton possessed much to encourage this credulity; she was not only eminently handsome, but she had that species of fascination in her air which a clever French writer defines as the feminine essence, "*plus femme que les autres femmes.*" If a very critical eye might have detected in her manner and address certain little awkwardnesses, a less exacting judgment would have probably been struck with them as attractions, recalling the fact of her youth, her simplicity, and the freshness of her nature. Above all other charms, however, was the radiant happiness that beamed out in every word, and look, and gesture; such a thorough sense of enjoyment—so intense a pleasure in life—is among the very rarest of all gifts.

There was enough of singularity, of the adventurous, in

the nature of her position to excel all the romance of her nature; there was more than enough of real splendour around her to give an air of fact and truth to the highest flights of her imagination. Had she been the sole daughter of the house and name, flatteries and caresses could not have been lavished on her more profusely—her will consulted—her wishes inquired—her taste evoked on every occasion. And yet, with all these seductions about her, she was not yet spoiled—not yet! Home and its dear associations were ever present to her mind; her humble fortune, and that simple life she used to lead, enforcing lessons of humility not yet distasteful. She could still recur to the memory of the little window that looked over the "Murg," and think the scenery beautiful. Her dear, dear papa was still all she had ever thought him. Nelly was yet the sweet-tempered, gentle, gifted creature she worshipped as a sister; even Hanserl was the kind, quaint emblem of his own dreamy "Vaterland." As yet no conflict had arisen between the past and the present—between the remembrance of narrow fortune and all its crippling exigencies, and the enjoyment of wealth, that seems to expand the generous feelings of the heart. The lustre of her present existence threw, as yet, no sickly light over the bygone—would it might have been always so!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SMALL SUPPER PARTY.

The great ball at the Mazzarini Palace "came off" just as other great balls have done, and will continue to do, doubtless, for ages hence. There was the usual, perhaps a little more than the usual, splendour of dress and diamonds—the same glare, and crash, and glitter, and crowd, and heat; the same buoyant light-heartedness among the young; the same corroding ennui of the old; taste in dress was criticized—looks were scanned—flirtations detected—quarrels discovered—fans were mislaid—hearts were lost—flounces were torn, and feelings hurt. There was the ordinary measure of what people call enjoyment, mixed up with the ordinary proportion of envy, shyness, pretension, sarcasm, coldness, and malice. It was a grand tournament of human passions in white satin and jewels; and if the wounds exchanged were not as rudely administered, they were to the full as dangerous as in the real lists of combat. Yet, in this mortal conflict, all seemed happy; there was an air of voluptuous abandonment over everything; and whatever cares they might have carried within, as far as appearance went, the world went well and pleasantly with them. The ball was, however, a splendid one, there was everything that could make it such. The *salons* were magnificent in decoration—the lighting a perfect blaze. There was beauty in abundance—diamonds in masses—and a Royal Highness from the Court, an insignificant little man, it is true, with a star and a stutter, who stared at every one, and spoke to nobody. Still he was the centre of a glittering group of handsome aides-de-camp, who displayed their fascinations in every gesture and look.

Apart from the great flood-tide of pleasure—down which so many float buoyantly—there is ever on these

occasions a deeper current that flows beneath, of human wile, and cunning, and strategy, just as, in many a German fairy tale, some curious and recondite philosophy lies hid beneath the little incidents related to amuse childhood. It would lead us too far from the path of our story were we seek for this "tiny thread amid the woof;" enough for our present purpose if we slightly advert to it, by asking our reader to accompany us to the small chamber which called Albert Jekyl master, and where now, at midnight, a little table of three covers was laid for supper. Three flasks of champagne stood in a little ice-pail in one corner, and on a dumb-waiter was arranged a dessert, which, for the season, displayed every charm of rarity; a large bouquet of moss-roses and camellias ornamented the centre of the board, and shed a pleasant odour through the room. The servant—whose dress and look bespoke him a waiter from a restaurant in the neighbourhood—had just completed all the arrangements of the table, placing chairs around it, and heaped fresh wood upon the hearth, when a carriage drew up at the door. The merry sound of voices and the step of feet were heard on the stairs, and the next moment a lady entered, whose dress of black lace, adorned with bouquets of blue flowers, admirably set off a figure and complexion of Spanish mould and character. To this, a black lace veil fastened to the hair behind, and worn across the shoulders, contributed. There was a lightness and intrepidity in her step as she entered the room that suited the dark, flashing, steady glance of her full black eyes. It would have, indeed, been difficult to trace in that almost insolent air of conscious beauty the calm, subdued, and almost sorrow-struck girl whom we have seen as Nina in a former chapter; but, however dissimilar in appearance, they were the same one individual, and the humble *femme de chambre* of Kate Dalton was the celebrated ballet-dancer of the great theatre of Barcelona.

The figure which followed was a strange contrast to that light and elegant form. He was an old, short man, of excessive corpulence in body, and whose face was bloated and purple by intemperance. He was dressed in the habit of a priest, and was in reality a canon of the

Dome Cathedral. His unwieldy gait, his short and laboured respiration, increased almost to suffocation by the ascent of the stairs and his cumbrous dress, seemed doubly absurd beside the flippant lightness of the "Ballarina." Jekyl came last, mimicking the old canon behind his back, and putting the waiter's gravity to a severe test by the bloated expansion of his cheek and the fin-like motion of his hands as he went.

"Ecco me!" cried he out, with a deep grunt, as he sank into a chair, and wiped the big drops from his forehead with the skirt of his gown.

"You tripped up the stairs like a gazelle, padre," said the girl, as she arranged her hair before the glass, and disposed the folds of her veil with all the tact of coquetry.

A thick snort, like the ejaculation a hippopotamus might have uttered, was the only reply, and Jekyl, having given a glance over the table to see all was in order, made a sign for Nina to be seated.

"Accursed be the stairs, and he that made them!" muttered the padre. "I feel as if my limbs had been torn on the rack. I have been three times up the steps of the high altar already to-day, and am tired as a dog.'

"Here is your favourite soup, padre," said Jekyl, as he moved the ladle through a smoking compound, whence a rich odour of tomato and garlic ascended. "This will make you young again."

"And who said I would wish to be young again?" cried the priest, angrily. "I have experience of what youth means every day in the confessional, and I promise you age has the best of it."

"Such a ripe and ruddy age as yours, padre!" said the girl, with affected simplicity.

"Just so, minx," rejoined he, "such ripeness as portends falling from the tree! Better even that than to be worm-eaten on the stalk—ay, or a wasp's nest within, girl —you understand me."

"You will never be good friends for half an hour together," said Jekyl, as he filled their glasses with champagne, and then touching his own to each, drank off a bumper.

"These are from Savoy, these truffles, and have no

flavour," said the padre, pushing away his plate. "Let me taste that lobster, for this is a half-fast to-day."

"They are like the priests," said Nina, laughing; "all black without and rotten within!"

"The ball went off admirably last night," interposed Jekyl, to stop what he foresaw might prove a sharp altercation.

"Yes," said Nina, languidly. "The dresses were fresher than the wearers. It was the first time for much of the satin —the same could not be said for many of the company."

"The Balderoni looked well," said Jekyl.

"Too fat, caro mio—too fat!" replied Nina.

"And she has eight penances in the week," grunted out the canon.

"There's nothing like wickedness for *embonpoint*, padre," said Nina, laughing.

"Angels always are represented as chubby girls," said the priest, whose temper seemed to improve as he ate on.

"Midchekoff, I thought, was out of temper all the evening," resumed Jekyl; "he went about with his glass in his eye, seeking for flaws in the lapis lazuli, or retouches in the pictures; and seemed terribly provoked at the goodness of the supper."

"I forgive him all, for not dancing with 'my lady,'" said Nina. "She kept herself disengaged for the prince for half the night, and the only reward was his Russian compliment of, 'What a bore is a ball, when one is past the age of dancing!'"

"Did the Noncio eat much?" asked the padre, who seemed at once curious and envious about the dignitary.

"He played whist all night," said Jekyl, "and never changed his partner!"

"The old Marchesa Guidotti?"

"The same. You know of that, then, padre?" asked Jekyl.

A grunt and a nod were all the response.

"What a curious chapter on 'La vie privée' of Florence your revelations might be, padre," said Jekyl, as if reflectingly. "What a deal of iniquity, great and small, comes to your ears every season."

"What a vast amount of it has its origin in that little

scheming brain of thine, Signor Jekyll, and in the fertile wits of your fair neighbour. The unhappy marriages thou hast made—the promising unions thou hast broken—the doubts thou hast scattered here, the dark suspicions there—the rightful distrust thou hast lulled, the false confidences encouraged, Youth, youth, thou hast a terrible score to answer for!"

"When I think of the long catalogue of villany you have been listening to, padre, not only without an effort, but a wish to check—when every sin recorded has figured in your ledger, with its little price annexed—when you have looked out upon the stormy sea of society, as a wrecker ranges his eye over an iron-bound coast in a gale, and thinks of the 'waifs' that soon will be his own—when, as I have myself seen you, you have looked indulgently down on petty transgressions, that must one day become big sins, and, like a skilful angler, throw the little fish back into the stream, in the confidence that when full-grown you can take them—when you have done all these things and a thousand more, padre, I cannot help muttering to myself, Age, age, what a terrible score thou hast to answer for!"

"I must say," interposed Nina, "you are both very bad company, and that nothing can be in worse taste than this interchange of compliments. You are both right to amuse yourselves in this world as your faculties best point out, but each radically wrong in attributing motives to the other. What, in all that is wonderful, have we to do with motives? I'm sure *I* have no grudges to cherish, no debts of dislike to pay off, anywhere. Any *diablerie I* take part in, is for pure mischief sake. I do think it rather a hard case, that, with somewhat better features, and I know a far shrewder wit than many others, I should perform second and third-rate parts in this great comedy of life, while many without higher qualifications are 'cast for the best characters.' This little score I do try and exact, not from individuals, but the world at large. Mischief with me is the child's pleasure in deranging the chessmen when the players are most intent on the game."

"Now, as to these Onslows—for we must be practical, padre mio," said Jekyl, "let us see what is to be done

with them. As regards matrimony, the real prize has left for England—this Dalton girl may or may not be a 'hit;' some aver that she is heiress to a large estate, of which the Onslows have obtained possession, and that they destine her for the young Guardsman. This must be inquired into. My lady has 'excellent dispositions,' and may have become anything, or everything."

"Let her come to 'the Church,' then," growled out the canon.

"Gently, padre, gently," said Jekyl, "you are really too covetous, and would drag the river always from your own net. We have been generous, hugely generous, to you for the last three seasons, and have made all your converts the pets of society, no matter how small and insignificant their pretensions. The vulgar have been adopted in the best circles, the ugly dubbed beautiful, the most tiresome of old maids have been reissued from the mint as new coinage. We have petted, flattered, and fawned upon those 'interesting Christians,' as the *Tablet* would call them, till the girls began to feel that there were no partners for a polka outside the Church of Rome, and that all the 'indulgences' of pleasure, like those of religion, came from the Pope. We cannot give you the Onslows, or, at least, not yet. We have yet to marry the daughter, provide for the friend, squeeze the son."

"Profligate young villain!—Reach me the champagne, Nina; and, Nina, tell your young mistress that it is scarcely respectful to come on foot to the mid-day mass; that the clergy of the town like to see the equipages of the rich before the doors of the cathedral, as a suitable homage to the Church. The Onslows have carriages in abundance, and their liveries are gorgeous and splendid!"

"It was her own choice," said Nina; "she is a singular girl for one that never before knew luxury of any kind."

"I hate these simple tastes," growled out the padre; "they bespeak that obstinacy which people call a 'calm temperament.' Her own dress, too, has no indication of her rank, Nina."

"That shall be cared for, padre."

"Why shouldn't that young soldier come along with her? Tell him that our choir is magnificent; whisper

him that the beautiful Marchesa di Guardoni sits on the very bench beside Miss Dalton."

Nina nodded an assent.

"The young girl herself is lax enough about her duties, Nina; she has not been even once to confession."

"That comes of these English!" cried Nina; "they make our service a constant jest. There is always some vulgar quizzing about saint-worship, or relic reverence, or the secrets of the confessional, going on amongst them."

"Does she permit this?" asked the priest, eagerly.

"She blushes sometimes, occasionally she smiles with a good-humour meant to deprecate these attacks, and now and then, when the sallies have been pushed too far, I have seen her in tears some hours after."

"Oh, if these heretics would but abstain from ridicule!" cried the canon. "The least lettered amongst them can scoff, and gibe, and rail. They have their stock subjects of sarcasm, too, handed down from father to son—poor, witless little blasphemies—thefts from Voltaire, who laughed at themselves—and much mischief do they work! Let them begin to read, however—let them commence to 'inquire,' as the phrase has it, and the game is our own."

"I think, padre," said Jekyl, "that more of your English converts are made upon principles of pure economy—Popery, like truffles, is so cheap abroad!"

"Away with you! away with you!" cried the padre, rebukingly. "They come to us as the children seek their mother's breast. Hand me the maccaroni."

"Padre mio," broke in Jekyl, "I wish you would be Catholic enough to be less Popish. We have other plots in hand here, besides increasing the funds of the 'Holy Carmelites;' and while we are disputing about the spoil, the game may betake themselves to other hunting-grounds. These Onslows must not be suffered to go hence."

"Albert is right," interposed Nina. "When the 'Midchekoff' condescends to think himself in love with the Dalton girl—when the Guardsman has lost some thousands more than he can pay — when my lady has offended one-half of Florence, and bullied the other—then, the city will have taken a hold upon their hearts, and you may begin your crusade when you please. Indeed,

I am not sure, if the season be a dull one, I would not listen to you myself."

"As you listened once before to the Abbé D'Esmonde," said the canon, maliciously.

The girl's cheek became deep red, and even over neck and shoulders the scarlet flush spread, while her eyes flashed a look of fiery passion.

"Do you dare—are you insolent enough to——"

Her indignation had carried her thus far, when, by a sudden change of temper, she stopped, and clasping her hands over her face, burst into tears.

Jekyl motioned the priest to be silent, while gently leading the other into the adjoining room, he drew the curtain, and left her alone.

"How could you say that?" said he—"you, padre, who know that this is more than jest?"

"Spare not the sinner, neither let the stripes be light—'Non sit levis flagella,' says Origen."

"Are the ortolans good, padre?" asked Jekyl, while his eye glittered with an intense appreciation of the old canon's hypocrisy.

"They are delicious! succulent, and tender," said the priest, wiping his lips. "Francesco does them to perfection."

"You at least believe in a cook," said Jekyl, but in so low a voice as to escape the other's notice.

"She is sobbing still," said the canon, in a whisper, and with a gesture towards the curtained doorway. "I like to hear them gulping down their sighs. It is like the glug-glug of a rich flask of 'Lagrime.'"

"But don't you pity them, padre?" asked Jekyl, in mock earnestness.

"Never! never! First of all, they do not suffer in all these outbursts. It is but decanting their feelings into another vessel, and they love it themselves! I have had them for hours together thus in the confessional, and they go away after, so relieved in mind, and so light of heart, there's no believing it."

"But Nina," said Jekyl, seriously, "is not one of these."

"She is a woman," rejoined the padre, "and it is only a priest can read them."

"You see human nature as the physician does, padre, always in some aspect of suffering. Of its moods of mirth and levity you know less than we do, who pass more butterfly lives!"

"True in one sense, boy; ours are the stony paths—ours are the weary roads in life! I like that Burgundy."

"It's very pleasant, padre. It is part of a case I ordered for the Onslows, but their butler shook the bottle when bringing it to table, and they begged me to get rid of it."

"These wines are not suited to Italy generally," said the canon; "but Florence has the merit of possessing all climates within the bounds of a single day, and even Chambertin is scarcely generous enough when the Tramontana is blowing!"

"Well, have you become better mannered? May I venture to come in?" cried Nina, appearing at the doorway.

"'Venga pure! Venga pure!'" growled out the canon. "I forgive thee everything. Sit down beside me, and let us pledge a friendship for ever."

"There, then, let this be a peace-offering," said she, taking the wreath of flowers from her own head and placing it on the brows of the padre. "You are now like the old Bacchus in the Boboli."

"And thou like——"

"Like what? speak it out!" cried she, angrily.

"Come, come, do, I beseech you, be good friends," interposed Jekyl. "We have met for other objects than to exchange reproaches."

"These are but the 'iræ amantium,' boy," said the priest; "the girl loves me with her whole heart."

"How you read my most secret thoughts!" said she, with a coquettish affectation of sincerity.

"Lectiones pravissimæ would they be!" muttered he, between his teeth.

"What is that? What is he mumbling there, Albert?" cried she, hastily.

"It is a benediction, Nina," replied Jekyl; "did you not hear the Latin?"

Peace was at last restored, and what between the adroit

devices of Jekyl and the goodness of his champagne, a feeling of pleasant sociality now succeeded to all the bickering, in which the festivity was prolonged to a late hour. The graver business which brought them together —the Onslows and their affairs—being discussed, they gave way to all the seductions of their exalted fancies. Jekyl, taking up his guitar, warbled out a French love song, in a little treble a bullfinch might have envied; Nina, with the aid of the padre's beads for castanets, stepped the measure of a bolero; while the old priest himself broke out into a long, chant, in which Ovid, Petrarch, Anacreon, and his breviary alternately figured, and under the influence of which he fell fast asleep at last, totally unconscious of the corked moustaches and eyebrows with which Nina ornamented his reverend countenance.

The sound of wheels in the silent street at last admonished them of the hour, and opening the window, Jekyl saw a brougham belonging to Sir Stafford just drawing up at the door.

"François is punctual," said Nina, looking at her watch; "I told him five o'clock."

"Had we not better set him down first?" said Jekyl, with a gesture toward the priest; "he does not live far away."

"With all my heart," replied she; "but you're not going to wash his face?"

"Of course I am, Nina. The jest might cost us far more than it was worth." And so saying, Jekyl proceeded to arrange the disordered dress and dishevelled hair of the padre, during the performance of which the old priest recovered sufficient consciousness to permit himself to be led down stairs and deposited in the carriage.

An hour later and all was still! Jekyl slumbering peacefully on his little French bed, over which the rose-coloured mosquito curtains threw a softened half-sunset hue; a gentle smile parted his lips, as in his dreams—the dreams of a happy and contented nature—he wove pleasant fancies and devised many a future scheme.

In his own dreary little den, behind the "Duomo," the padre also slept heavily, not a thought, not a single

passing idea breaking the stagnant surface of his deep lethargy.

Nina, however, was wakeful, and had no mind for repose. Her brilliant costume carefully laid aside, she was arranging her dark hair into its habitually modest braid; her very features composing themselves, as she did so, into their wonted aspect of gentleness and submission.

All the change of dress being little in comparison with the complete alteration now observable in her whole air and demeanour, she seemed a totally different being. And she was so, too; for while hypocrites to the world, we completely forget that we share in the deception ourselves.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MIDNIGHT RECEPTION.

It was past midnight, the Opera was just over, and the few privileged guests who were permitted to pay their visits to Lady Hester Onslow were assembled in the little drawing-room and boudoir, sacred to these exclusive receptions. Nothing could be in stronger contrast than the gorgeous splendour of the apartment and the half-dressed, careless, lounging ease of the men as they stretched themselves on the ottomans, lounged on the sofas, or puffed their cigars, alike indifferent to the place and the presence of two ladies who, dressed in the very perfection of "toilette," did the honours of the reception.

Lady Hester, who wore a small embroidered velvet cap, coquettishly set on one side of the head, and a species of velvet jacket, such as is common in Greece, lay upon a sofa beneath a canopy of pink silk covered with lace; a

most splendidly ornamented hooka, the emerald mouthpiece of which she held in her hand, stood on a little cushion beside her; while grouped around in every attitude that taste and caprice suggested—on chairs on cushions, squabs, "*prie-Dieu*," and other drawing-room devices of a like nature—were some half-dozen men, whose air and bearing pronounced them long habituated to all the usages of society. One stamp of feature and style pervaded all; pale, dark-eyed, black-bearded, and weary-looking, they seemed as though they were tired of a life of dissipation, and yet utterly incapable of engaging in any other.

All born to high rank, some to large fortune, they found that no other career was open to them except vice in one shape or other. The policy of their rulers had excluded them from every road of honourable ambition; neither as statesmen nor soldiers could they hope to win fame or glory. Their habits of life and the tone of society gave no impulse to the cultivation of science or literature. The topics discussed in their circle never by chance adverted to a book; and there they were, with heads whose development indicated all that was intellectual, with brows and foreheads that betokened every gift of mental excellence, wearing away life in the dullest imaginable routine of dissipation, their minds neglected, their hearts corrupted, enervated in body, and deprived of all energy of character; they wore, even in youth, the exhausted look of age, and bore in every lineament of their features the type of lassitude and discontent.

In the adjoining room sat Kate Dalton at a tea-table. She was costumed—for we cannot use any milder word—in a species of "moyen-âge" dress, whose length of stomacher and deep-hanging sleeves recalled the portraits of Titian's time; a small cap covered the back of her head, through an aperture in which the hair appeared, its rich auburn masses fastened by a short stiletto of gold, whose hilt and handle were studded with precious stones; massive gold chain, with a heavy cross of the same metal, was the only ornament she wore. Widely different as was the dress from that humble guise in which the reader first knew her, the internal change was even greater

still; no longer the bashful, blushing girl, beaming with all the delight of a happy nature, credulous, light-hearted, and buoyant, she was now composed in feature, calm, and gentle-mannered; the placid smile that moved her lips, the graceful motion of her head, her slightest gestures, her least words, all displaying a polished ease and elegance which made even her beauty and attraction secondary to the fascination of her manner. It is true the generous frankness of her beaming eyes was gone; she no longer met you with a look of full and fearless confidence: the cordial warmth, the fresh and buoyant sallies of her ready wit, had departed, and in their place was a timid reserve, a cautious, shrinking delicacy, blended with a quiet but watchful spirit of repartee, that flattered by the very degree of attention it betokened.

Perhaps our reader will not feel pleased with us for saying that she was more beautiful now than before; that intercourse with the world, dress, manners, the tact of society, the stimulus of admiration, the assured sense of her own charms, however they may have detracted from the moral purity of her nature, had yet invested her appearance with higher and more striking fascinations. Her walk, her curtsey, the passing motion of her hand, her attitude as she sat, were perfect studies of grace. Not a trace was left of her former manner; all was ease, pliancy, and elegance. Two persons were seated near her: one of these, our old acquaintance, George Onslow; the other was a dark, sallow-visaged man, whose age might have been anything from thirty-five to sixty,—for, while his features were marked by the hard lines of time, his figure had all the semblance of youth. By a broad blue ribbon round his neck he wore the decoration of Saint Nicholas, and the breast of his coat was covered with stars, crosses, and orders of half the courts of Europe. This was Prince Midchekoff, whose grandfather, having taken an active part in the assassination of the Emperor Paul, had never been reconciled to the Imperial family, and was permitted to reside in a kind of honourable banishment out of Russia; a punishment which he bore up under, it was said, with admirable fortitude. His fortune was reputed to be immense, and there was

scarcely a capital of Europe in which he did not possess a residence. The character of his face was peculiar, for while the forehead and eyes were intellectual and candid, the lower jaw and mouth revealed his Calmuck origin, an expression of intense, unrelenting cruelty being the impression at once conveyed by the thin, straight, compressed lips, and the long, projecting chin, seeming even longer from the black-pointed beard he wore. There was nothing vulgar or common-place about him; he never could have passed unobserved anywhere, and yet he was equally far from the type of high birth. His manners were perfectly well bred; and, although he spoke seldom, his quiet and attentive air and his easy smile showed he possessed the still rarer quality of listening well.

There was another figure, not exactly of this group, but at a little distance off, beside a table in a recess, on which a number of prints and drawings were scattered, and in the contemplation of which he affected to be absorbed; while, from time to time, his dark eyes flashed rapidly across to note all that went forward. He was a tall and singularly handsome man, in the dress of a priest. His hair, black and waving, covered a forehead high, massive, and well developed; his eyes were deep-set, and around the orbits ran lines that told of long and hard study,—for the Abbé D'Esmonde was a distinguished scholar; and, as a means of withdrawing him for a season from the overtoil of reading, he had been attached temporarily as a species of Under-Secretary to the Mission of the "Nonce." In this guise he was admitted into all the society of the capital, where his polished address and gentle manner soon made him a general favourite.

Equally removed from the flippant levity of the abbé as a class, and the gross and sensual coarseness of the "old priest," D'Esmonde was a perfect man of the world, so far as taking a lively interest in all the great events of politics, watching eagerly the changeful features of the times, and studying acutely the characters of the leading men, at whose dictates they were modified. Its pleasures and amusements, too, he was willing to partake of moderately and unobtrusively; but he held himself far apart

from all those subjects of gossip and small-talk which, in a society of lax morality, occupy so considerable a space, and in which the great dignitaries who wear scarlet and purple stockings are often seen to take a lively and animated share. Some ascribed this reserve to principle; others called it hypocrisy; and some, again, perhaps with more truth, deemed it the settled line of action of one who already destined himself for a high and conspicuous station, and had determined that his character should add weight and dignity to his talents.

It might have been thought that he was a singular guest to have been admitted to receptions like the present; but Jekyl, who managed everything, had invited him, on the principle, as he said, that a gourmand has a decanter of water always beside him at dinner, "not to drink, but because it looks temperate." The abbé's presence had the same effect; and, certainly, his calm and dignified demeanour, his polished address, and cultivated tone, were excellent certificates of good character for the rest.

At the tea-table the conversation languished, or only went forward at intervals. Onslow's French was not fluent, and he was silent from shame. Kate felt that she ought not to take the lead; and the prince, habitually reserved, spoke very little, and even that in the discursive, unconnected tone of a man who was always accustomed to find that any topic *he* started should be instantly adopted by the company.

The cold and steady stare with which he surveyed her would, but a short time back, have covered her face with a blush; she could not have borne unabashed the glance of searching, almost insolent meaning he bestowed upon her; but now, whatever her heart might have felt, her features were calm and passionless; nor did she in the slightest degree show any consciousness of a manner that was costing Onslow a struggle whether to laugh at or resent.

In one sense these two men were rivals, but each so impressed with proud contempt for the other, their rivalry was unknown to both. Kate, however, with her woman's tact, saw this, and knew well how her least smile, or slightest word, inclined the balance to this side or to that. The

prince was inveighing against the habit of wintering in Italy as one of the most capital blunders of the age.

"We forget," said he, "that, in our present civilization, art is always first and nature second, as we see evidenced in all the results of agriculture. It is not the most fertile soil, but the highest-laboured one, which produces the best fruits. So with respect to climate, we never bear in mind that, where nature does most, man always does least."

"According to that rule, prince, we should winter at St. Petersburg, and spend the dog-days at Calcutta," said Kate, smiling.

"So we should," replied he; "the appliances to resist heat or cold, of man's invention, are far better adapted to enjoyment than the accidental variations of climate."

"In my country," said Onslow, tartly, "men study less how to avoid the inclemencies of weather than to become indifferent to them. Hunting, shooting, and deer-stalking are very sure methods to acquire this."

The prince paid no attention to the remark, but turned the conversation into another channel, by asking Kate if she had ever read Fourier's book; from this he wandered away to the characteristic differences of national music; thence to the discoveries then making in Central America; and lastly, engaged her in an animated discussion of the question of slavery. On none of these points was he deeply or even well informed, but he possessed that fluency and facility which intercourse with society confers; and as all his knowledge was derived from men, and not from books, it bore a certain stamp of originality about it that secured attention. Not, indeed, from George Onslow; he was the most bored of men. None of the topics were his topics. Of Tattersall's, the Guards' Club, the society of London, the odds on the "Derby," he could have discoursed well and pleasantly—from what was "wrong" with the Sambucca filly, to what was not right with Lady Flutterton's niece, he could have told you everything; but all these other themes were, in his estimation, but sheer pedantry; and, indeed, they only lacked a little knowledge —a very little would have sufficed—to be so.

"He is gone," said the prince, with a caustic smile which revealed a plan; "gone at last."

"So, then, this was a device of yours, prince," said she, laughing. "I really must call my cousin back and tell him so."

"No, no," said he seriously. "I have won my battle, let me profit by my victory. Let me speak to you on another subject." He drew his chair a little nearer to the table as he spoke, and laid his arm on it. Kate's heart beat fast and full; and the colour came and went rapidly in her cheek; a vague sense of fear, of shame, and of triumphant pride were all at conflict within her. There was but one theme in the world that could have warranted such a commencement—so serious, so grave, so purpose-like. Was this, then, possible? The glittering stars—all a blaze of brilliants—that shone beside her, seemed an emblem of that high state which was now within her reach; and what a torrent of varied emotions rushed through her heart. Of home, of her father, of Nelly, of Frank, and, lastly, what thoughts of George—poor George—whom she knew loved her, and to whom, without loving, she was not altogether indifferent. "Do not be agitated, Mademoiselle," said the prince, laying the slightest touch of his jewelled fingers on her arm; "I ask a little patience and a little calm consideration for what I am about to say."

"Is that really like an Irish peasant's cottage, Miss Dalton?" said the abbé, as he held before her a drawing of one, in all the details of its most striking misery.

"Yes, perfectly—not exaggerated in the least," said she, hurriedly blushing alike at the surprise and the interruption.

"You have no such misery, Monsieur le Prince, in Russia, I believe?" remarked the priest, with a courteous bend of the head.

"We are well governed, sir; and nothing displays it more palpably than that no man forgets his station," said the prince, with an insolent *hauteur* that made Kate blush over neck and forehead, while D'Esmonde stood calm and passionless under the sarcasm.

"So I have always heard, sir," said he, blandly. "I remember, when at Wredna——"

"You have been at Wredna?" asked the prince, in an altered voice.

But the other, not heeding the interruption, went on :—

"I remember, when at Wredna, to have heard an anecdote which strikingly illustrates the rigid obedience yielded to power, and the condition of public opinion at the same time. A manumitted slave, who was raised to high rank and wealth by the favour of the Czar, had returned to Wredna in the capacity of governor. A short time after his arrival, he was tormented by applications and letters from a woman in great poverty, who asserted that she was his mother. Fedeorovna, of course in secret, proved the truth of her assertion, but the only answer she received was a significant caution to be silent, and not appeal to a relationship which could only prove offensive. Perhaps incredulous of the authentic character of so cruel a reply, perhaps stung to angry indignation by it, she carried the humble basket of fruit and vegetables that she hawked for a livelihood before the door of the great mansion where her son resided, but, instead of advertising her wares, as is customary in these Muscovite markets, by some picture of a saint or some holy inscription, she carried a little placard, with the inscription—'The Mother of Alexovitch,' the name of the Governor. A crowd soon gathered around this singular booth, heralded by so strange an announcement, and as speedily the police resorted to the spot, and carried the offender before the judge. The defence was the simple one that she had merely averred the truth. I need not weary you with the mockery of investigation that followed ; the result is all I need tell. This woman was knouted and sent away to Siberia. So much for the Governor. As for the governed, they were enthusiastic in praise of his justice and clemency ; for he might have ordered her to be beheaded."

"Do you tell the story as a fact, sir?" said the prince, whose dark cheek became almost green in its sallowness as he spoke.

"I tell it distinctly as a fact. The Papa who received the woman's confession repeated the tale on his own death-bed, from whence it reached me."

"Priests can be liars, whether Greek or Roman," said the prince, in a voice almost suffocated with passion ; and then, suddenly checking the course of his anger, he turned

to Kate with a sickly smile, and said, "Mademoiselle will pardon a rudeness in her presence which nothing short of so gross a calumny could have elicited."

"I will furnish you with all the names to-morrow, Monsieur le Prince," said D'Esmonde, in a whisper; and sauntered away into the adjoining room.

"You look pale, Miss Dalton," said the prince.

"That shocking story——"

"Which of course you don't believe."

"The Abbé D'Esmonde I have always heard to be a person of strict veracity and of extreme caution."

"Be careful of him, Miss Dalton. It is not without good reason that I say this."

There was a degree of solemnity in the way he uttered these words that made Kate thoughtful and serious. Unaccustomed to see in society anything but features of pleasure and amusement, she was suddenly awakened to the conviction that its calm waters covered rocks and quicksands as perilous as stormier seas. Could people so full of amiabilities be dangerous acquaintances? Was there poison in this charmed cup? Was the doubt which sprang to her mind——But she had not time for the inquiry, as the prince offered her his arm to the supper-room.

CHAPTER XXV.

A "LEVANTER."

In our penal settlements nothing is more common than to find the places of honour and distinction filled by men who were once convicts, and who may date the favourable turn of their fortune to the day of their having transgressed the law! so in certain continental cities are individuals to be found occupying conspicuous stations and enjoying a large share of influence, whose misdeeds at home first made them exiles, and who, leaving England in shame, are received abroad with honour. There is this difference between the two cases: for while the convict owes all his future advancement to his own efforts at reformation, the absentee obtains his "brevet" of character by the simple fact of his extradition. He shakes off his rascalities as he does his rheumatism, when he quits the foggy climate of England and emerges, spotless and without stain, upon the shores of Ostend or Boulogne.

To do this, however, he must not bear a plebeian name, nor pertain to the undistinguishable herd of vulgar folk. He must belong to some family of mark and note, with peers for his uncles and peeresses for cousins; nor is he always safe if he himself be not a member of an hereditary legislature. We have been led to these reflections by having to chronicle the arrival in Florence of Lord Norwood; a vague and confused murmur of his having done something, people knew not what, in England having preceded him. Some called him "poor Norwood," and expressed sorrow for him; others said he was a capital fellow, up to everything, and that they were delighted at his coming. A few, of very tender and languishing virtue themselves, wondered if they ought to meet him as before, but the prevailing impression was charitable. The affair at Graham's might have been exaggerated, the Newmarket

business was possibly a mistake. "Any man might owe money, and not be able to pay it," was a sentiment pretty generally repeated and as generally believed; and, in fact, if to be tried by one's peers be an English privilege, the noble viscount here enjoyed it at the hands of a jury unimpeachable on the score of equality.

We are far from suggesting that Norwood's character as a "shot" had any concern with this mild verdict; but certain it is his merits in this capacity were frequently remembered, and always with honourable mention.

"No man plays *écarté* better!" said Haggerstone, while as yet the viscount's arrival was unknown, and as he discussed the rumours upon him before a group of listening Englishmen at the door of the "Club"—"no man plays *écarté* better—nor with better luck!" added he, with a chuckle that was intended to convey a meaning beyond the mere words.

"Has he been a large winner, then?" asked one of the bystanders, respectfully, looking to the colonel for information, for, in a certain set, he was regarded as the most thoroughly conversant man with all the faults and follies of high life.

"No man wins invariably, sir, except Brooke Morris, perhaps," replied he, always happy at the opportunity to quote the name of a man of fashion in a tone of familiarity.

"That was the Mo-Mo-Morris that ruined Hopeton, wasn't it?" broke in Purvis, quite forgetting that the individual he addressed was reported to have a share in the transaction. Haggerstone, however, did not deign a reply, but puffed his cigar in perfect contempt of his questioner.

"Who is this coming up here?" said one; "he looks like a new arrival. He is English, certainly—that frock has a London cut there's no mistaking."

"By Jove, it's Norwood!" cried Haggerstone, edging away, as he spoke, from the group. Meanwhile, the noble viscount, a well-dressed, well-whiskered man, of about thirty, came leisurely forward, and touching his hat familiarly, said,—

"Ha! you here, Haggerstone! What is Florence doing?"

"Pretty much as it always did, my lord. I don't think its morals have improved since you knew it a few years ago."

"Or you wouldn't be here, Haggy—eh?" said the viscount, laughing at his own joke. "Not suit your book, if it took a virtuous turn—eh?"

"I plead guilty, my lord. I believe I do like to shoot folly as it flies."

"Ah, yes! And I've seen you taking a sitting shot at it too, Haggy," said the other, with a heartier laugh, which, despite of the colonel's efforts not to feel, brought a crimson flush to his cheek.

"Is there any play going on, Haggy?"

"Nothing that you would call play, my lord; a little whist for Nap points, a little *écarté*, a little piquet, and, now and then, we have a round game at Sabloukoff's."

"Poor old fellow! and he's alive still? And where's the Jariominski?"

"Gone back to Russia."

"And Maretti?"

"In Saint Angelo, I believe."

"And that little Frenchman—what was his name?—his father was a Marshal of the Empire."

"D'Acosta."

"The same. Where is he?"

"Shot himself this spring."

"Pretty girl, his sister. What became of her?"

"Some one told me that she had become a Sœur de Charité."

"What a pity! So they're all broken up, I see."

"Completely so."

"Then what have you got in their place?"

"Nothing fast, my lord, except, perhaps, your friends the Onslows."

"Yes; they're going it, I hear. Isn't there a rich niece, or cousin, or something of that sort, with them?"

"They've got a prettyish girl, called Dalton; but as to her being rich, I think it very unlikely, seeing that her family are living in Germany in a state of the very closest poverty."

"And Master George, how does he carry on the war?"

said the viscount, who seemed quite heedless of the other's correction.

"He plays a little peddling *écarté* now and then; but you can see that he has burned his fingers, and dreads the fire. They say he's in love with the Dalton girl."

"Of course he is, if they live in the same house; and he's just the kind of fool to marry her, too. Who's that little fellow, listening to us?"

"Purvis, my lord; don't you remember him? He's one of the Ricketts's set."

"To be sure I do. How are you, Purvis? You look so young and so fresh, I could not persuade myself it could be my old acquaintance."

"I've taken to homœ-homœ-homœ-homœ——" Here he opened his mouth wide, and gasped till he grew black in the face.

"What's the word? Give it him, Haggy. It's all up with him," said the viscount.

"Homœopathy—eh?"

"Just so. Homœ-homœ——"

"Confound it, man, can't you be satisfied? when you're once over the fence, you needn't go back to leap it. And how is the dear—what's her name—Agathe?—no, Zoe—how is she?"

"Quite well, my lord, and would be cha-cha-cha-rmed to see you."

"Living in that queer humbug still—eh?"

"In the Vill-ino, my lord, you mean?"

"Egad! she seems the only thing left; like the dog on the wreck—eh, Haggy?"

"Just so, my lord," said the other, with a complacent laugh.

"What a mass of old crockery she must have got together by this time!" said the viscount, yawning with a terrible recollection of her tiresomeness.

"You came out with a yacht, my lord?" asked Haggerstone.

"Pretty well, for a man that they call ru-ru-ruined," said Purvis, laughing.

Norwood turned a look of angry indignation at him, and then, as if seeing the unworthiness of the object, merely said,—

"A yacht is the only real economy now-a-days. You get rid at once of all trains of servants, household, stable people—even the bores of your acquaintance you cut off. By-by, Purvis." And, with a significant wink at Haggerstone, he passed across the street, in time to overtake Onslow, who was just passing.

"I think I ga-ga-gave it him there," cried Purvis, with an hysteric giggle of delight; who, provided that he was permitted to fire his shot, never cared how severely he was himself riddled by the enemy's fire. Meanwhile, the viscount and his friend were hastening forward to the Mazzarini Palace, as totally forgetful of Purvis as though that valuable individual had never existed.

We may take this opportunity to mention, that when the rumours which attributed a grand breach of honourable conduct to Lord Norwood had arrived at Florence, Sir Stafford, who never had any peculiar affection for the viscount, declared himself in the very strongest terms on the subject of his offending, and took especial pains to show the marked distinction between occasions of mere wasteful extravagance and instances of fraudulent and dishonest debt.

It was in vain he was told that the rigid rule of English morality is always relaxed abroad, and that the moral latitude is very different in London and Naples. He was old-fashioned enough to believe that honour is the same in all climates; and having received from England a very detailed and specific history of the noble lord's misdoings, he firmly resolved not to receive him.

With all George Onslow's affection and respect for his father, he could not help feeling that this was a mere prejudice—one of the lingering remnants of a past age; a sentiment very respectable, perhaps, but totally inapplicable to present civilization, and quite impracticable in society. In fact, as he said himself, "Who is to be known, if this rule be acted on? What man—or, further still, what woman—of fashionable life will stand this scrutiny? To attempt such exclusiveness, one should retire to some remote provincial town—some fishing village of patriarchal simplicity; and, even there, what security was there against ignoble offendings? How should he stand the

ridicule of his club and his acquaintance, if he attempted to assume such a standard?" These arguments were strengthened by his disbelief, or rather his repugnance to believe the worst of Norwood; and furthermore, supported by Lady Hester's open scorn for all such "hypocritical trumpery," and her avowal that the viscount should be received, by *her*, at least. Exactly as of old, George Onslow's mind was in a state of oscillation and doubt—now leaning to this side, now inclining to that—when the question was decided for him, as it so often is in like cases, by a mere accident; for, as he loitered along the street, he suddenly felt an arm introduced within his own; he turned hastily round, and saw Norwood, who, with all his customary coolness, asked after each member of the family, and at once proposed to pay them a visit.

Of all men living, none were less suited than Onslow for assuming any part, or taking any decisive line, which could possibly be avoided, or even postponed. He hated, besides, to do an ungracious thing anywhere, or to any one. It might be, thought he, that Norwood's scrape could all be explained away. Perhaps, after all, the thing is a mere trifle; and if he were to take the decided line of cutting a man without due cause, the consequences might be most injurious. These, and fifty such-like scruples, warred within him, and so engaged his attention, that he actually heard not one word of all that "town gossip" which Norwood was retailing for his amusement. At last, while following out his own thoughts, George came to the resolution of finding out at once the precise position in which Norwood stood, and to this end asked the last news from Newmarket.

Norwood's coolness never forsook him at a question whose very suddenness was somewhat awkward.

"Bad enough," said he, with an easy laugh. "We have all of us been 'hit hard.' Knolesby has lost heavily. Burchester, too, has had a smasher; and I myself have not escaped. In fact, George, the 'Legs' have had it all their own way. I suppose you heard something about it out here?"

"Why, yes; there were reports——"

"Oh, hang reports, man! Never trust to old women's tales. And that confounded fellow Haggerstone, I'm certain, has been spreading all kinds of stories. But the facts are simple enough."

"I'm heartily glad you say so; for, to tell you the truth, Norwood, my father is one of the prejudiced about this affair, and I'm dying to be able to give him a full explanation of the whole."

"Ah! Sir Stafford, too, among the credulous!" said Norwood, slowly. "I could scarcely have supposed so. No matter; only I did fancy that he was not exactly the person to form hasty conclusions against any man's character. However, you may tell him—for, as for myself, I'll not condescend to explain to any one but you—the thing is a very simple one. There was a mare of Hopeton's, a Brockdon filly, entered for the Slingsby, and a number of us agreed to 'go a heavy thing' upon her against the field. A bold *coup* always, George, that backing against the field. Never do it, my boy, and particularly when you've a set of rascally foreign Legs banded against you—Poles and Hungarian fellows, George, the downiest coves ever you met, and who, in their confounded jargon, can sell you before your own face. Nothing like John Bull, my boy. Straight, frank, and open John for ever! Hit him hard, and he'll hit you again; but no treachery, no stab in the dark. Oh, no, no! The turf in England was another thing before these continental rascals came amongst us. I was always against admitting them within the ring. I black-balled a dozen of them at the Club. But see what perseverance does; they're all in now. There's no John-Bull feeling among our set, and we're paying a smart price for it. Never trust those German fellows, George. Out of England these is no truth, no honour. But, above all, don't back against the field; there are so many dodges against you; so many 'dark horses' come out fair. That's it, you see; that's the way I got it so heavily; for when Ruxton came and told me that 'Help-me-Over' was dead lame, I believed him. A fetlock lameness is no trifle, you know; and there was a swelling as large as my hand around the coronet. The foreign fellows can manage

that in the morning, and the horse will run to win the same day. I saw it myself. Ah, John Bull for ever! No guile, no deceit in him. Mind me, George, I make this confession for you alone. I'll not stoop to repeat it. If any man dare to insinuate anything to my discredit, I'll never give myself the trouble of one word of explanation, but nail him to it—twelve paces, and no mistake. I don't think my right hand has forgot its cunning. Have him out at once, George; parade him on the spot, my boy; that's the only plan. What, is this your quarter?" asked he, as they stopped at the entrance of the spacious palace. "I used to know this house well of old. It was the Embassy in Templeton's time. Very snug it used to be. Glad to see you've banished all those maimed old deities that used to line the staircase, and got rid of that tiresome tapestry, too. Pretty vases those—fresh-looking that conservatory—they're always strong in camellias in Florence. This used to be the billiard-room; I think you've made a good alteration; it looks better as a *salon*. Ah! I like this—excellent taste that chintz furniture—just the thing for Italy, and exactly what nobody thought of before!"

"I'll see if my lady be visible," said George, as he threw the *Morning Post* to his friend, and hastily quitted the chamber.

Norwood was no sooner left alone, than he proceeded to take a leisurely survey of the apartment, in the course of which his attention was arrested by a water-colour drawing, representing a young girl leaning over a balcony, and which he had no difficulty in at once guessing to be Kate Dalton. There was something in the character of her beauty—an air of almost daring haughtiness—that seemed to strike his fancy, for, as he gazed, he drew himself up to his full height, and seemed to assume in his own features the proud expression of the portrait.

"With a hundred thousand and that face, one might make you a viscountess, and yet not do badly either!" said he to himself; and then, as if satisfied that he had given time enough to a mere speculative thought, he turned over the visiting cards to see the names of the current acquaintance: "Midchekoff, Estrolenka, Janini,

Tiverton, Latrobe—the old set; the Ricketts, too, and Haggerstone. What can have brought them here? Oh! there must have been a ball, for here are shoals of outsiders; the great Smith-Brown-and-Thompson community; and here, on the very smallest of pasteboards, in the very meekest of literals, have we our dear friend 'Albert Jekyl.' He'll tell me all I want to know," said Norwood, as he threw himself back on the comfortable depth of a well-cushioned chair, and gave way to a pleasant reverie.

When George Onslow had informed Lady Hester of Norwood's arrival, he hastened to Sir Stafford's apartment, to tell him how completely the viscount had exonerated himself from any charge that might be made to his discredit; not, indeed, that George understood one syllable of the explanation, nor could trace anything like connection between the disointed links of the narrative; he could only affirm his own perfect conviction in Norwood's honour, and hoped an equal degree of faith from his father. Fortunately for his powers of persuasiveness, they were not destined to be so sorely tried, for Sir Stafford had just walked out, and George, too eager to set all right about Norwood, took his hat and followed, in the hope of overtaking him.

Lady Hester was already dressed, and about to enter the drawing-room, when George told her that Norwood was there; and yet she returned to her room, and made some changes in her toilet, slight, and perhaps too insignificant to record, but yet of importance enough to occupy some time, and afford her an interval for thoughts which, whatever their nature, served to flush her cheek and agitate her deeply.

It an awkward thing at any time to meet with the person to whom you once believed you should have been married; to see, on the terms of mere common acquaintance, the individual with whose fate and fortune you at one time fancied your own was indissolubly bound up, for weal or woe, for better or for worse. To exchange the vapid common-places of the world; to barter the poor counters of that petty game called society with her or him with whom you have walked in all the unbounded confidence

of affection, speculating on a golden future, or glorying in a delicious dream of present bliss; to touch with ceremonious respect that hand you have so often held fast within your own; to behold with respectful distance that form beside which you have sat for hours, lost in happy fancies; to stand, as it were, and trace out with the eye some path in life we might have followed, wondering whither it would have led us, if to some higher pinnacle of gratified ambition, if to disappointments darker than those we have ever known; speculating on a future which is already become a past, and canvassing within our hearts the follies that have misled and the faults that have wrecked us! Such are among the inevitable reminiscences of meeting; and they are full of a soft and touching sorrow, not all unpleasing either, as they remind us of our youth and its buoyancy. Far otherwise was the present case. Whatever might have been the bold confidence with which Lady Hester protested her belief in Norwood's honour, her own heartfelt knowledge of the man refuted the assertion. She knew thoroughly that he was perfectly devoid of all principle, and merely possessed that conventional degree of fair dealing indispensable to association with his equals. That he would do anything short of what would subject him to disgrace she had long seen; and perhaps the unhappy moment had come when even this restraint was no longer a barrier. And yet, with all this depreciating sense of the man, would it be believed she had once loved him! ay, with as sincere an affection as she was capable of feeling for anything.

'Tis true, time and its consequences had effaced much of this feeling—his own indifference had done something, her new relations with the world had done more; and if she ever thought of him now, it was with a degree of half terror that there lived one man who had so thoroughly read all the secrets of her heart, and knew every sentiment of her nature.

Norwood was sitting in a chair as she entered, amusing himself with the gambols of a little Blenheim spaniel, whose silver collar bore the coronet of the Russian prince. He never perceived Lady Hester until she was close beside him, and in an easy, half indifferent tone, said,—

"How d'ye do, my lord?"

"What, Hester!" said he, starting up, and taking her hand in both his own.

She withdrew it languidly, and seating herself, not upon the sofa to which he wished to lead her, but in a chair, asked when he had arrived, and by what route.

"I came out in a yacht; stopping a few days at Gibraltar, and a week at Malta."

"Had you pleasant weather?"

"After we got clear of the Channel, excellent weather."

"You came alone, I suppose?"

"Quite alone."

"How do you get on without your dear friend Effingdale, or your 'familiar,' Upton?"

Norwood coloured a little at a question the drift of which he felt thoroughly, but tried with a laugh to evade an answer.

"Are they in England? I thought I read their names at the Newmarket meeting?" asked she, after waiting in vain for a reply.

"Yes; they were both at Newmarket," replied he, shortly.

"Was it a good meeting?"

"I can scarcely say so," rejoined he, attempting a laugh. "*My* book turned out very unfortunately."

"I heard so," was the short reply; and in a tone so dry and significant that a dead silence followed.

"Pretty spaniel, that," said Norwood, trying a slight sortie into the enemy's camp. "A present, I suppose, from Midchekoff?"

"Yes."

"It is not clean bred, however, no more than his late master. Have you seen much of the prince?"

"He comes here every evening, after the Opera."

"What a bore that must be—he is a most insufferable proser."

"I must say I disagree with you; I reckon him excessively agreeable."

"How changed you must be, Hes—Lady Hester."

"I believe I am, my lord."

"And yet you look the same—the very same as when

we sauntered for hours through the old woods at Dipsley." She blushed deeply; less, perhaps, at the words, than at the look which accompanied them.

"Is this your newly-found niece or cousin?" said Norwood, as he pointed to the portrait of Kate Dalton.

"Yes. Isn't she pretty?"

"The picture is."

"She is much handsomer, however—a charming creature in every respect—as you will confess when you see her."

"And for what high destiny is she meant? Is she to be a Russian Princess, a Duchessa of Italy, or the goodwife of an untitled Englishman?"

"She may have her choice, I believe, of either of the three."

"Happy girl!" said he, half scornfully; "and when may I hope to behold so much excellence?"

"To-day, if you like to dine here."

"I should like it much—but—but——"

"But what?"

"It's better to be frank at once, Hester," said he, boldly, "and say that I feel you are grown very cold and distant toward me. This is not your old manner, this not exactly the reception I looked for. Now, if you have any cause for this, would it not be better and fairer to speak it out openly than continue to treat me in this slighting fashion? You are silent—so there is something; pray let's hear it."

"What of Newmarket?" said she, in a low voice, so faint as almost to be a whisper.

"So, that's it," said he, as he folded his arms and looked steadfastly at her.

There was something in the cold and steady gaze he bestowed upon her that abashed, if not actually alarmed, Lady Hester. She had seen the same look once or twice before, and always as the prelude to some terrible evidence of his temper.

"Lady Hester," said he, in a low, distinct, and very slow voice, as though he would not have her lose a word he spoke, "the explanation which a man would ask for at the peril of his life ought not, in common justice, to be quite costless to a lady. It is perfectly possible that you

may not care for the price—be it so; only I warn you that if you wish for any information on the subject you allude to, *I* will inquire whether——"

Here he dropped his voice, and whispered two or three words rapidly in her ear, after which she lay back, pale, sick, and almost fainting, without strength to speak or even to move.

"Do not say, or still less feel, that this contest is of my provoking. Never was any man less in the humour to provoke hostilities, and particularly from old friends. I have just had bad luck—the very worst of bad luck. I have lost everything but my head; and even that, cool and calculating as it is, may go too if I be pushed too far. Now you have a frank and free confession from me. I have told you more than I would to any other living—more, perhaps, than I ought even to you."

"Then what do you intend to do here?" asked she, faintly.

"Wait—wait patiently for a while. Fix upon any one that I can discover mutters a syllable to my discredit, and shoot him as I would a dog."

"There may be some who, without openly discussing, will shun your society, and avoid your intercourse."

"Sir Stafford, for instance," said he, with an insolent laugh. She nodded slightly, and he went on: "My lady's influence will, I am certain set me right in that quarter."

"I may be unequal to the task."

"You can at least try, madam."

"I have tried, Norwood. I have gone the length of declaring that I disbelieved every story against you—that I reposed the most implicit faith in your honour—and that I would certainly receive you and admit your visits as heretofore."

"And, of course, you'll keep your word'

"If you exact it——"

"Of course I shall! Hester, this is no time for quibbling. I've got into a mess, the worst of all the bad scrapes which have ever befallen me. A little time and a little management will pull me through—but I must have both; nor is it in such a place, and with such a society as this,

a man need fear investigation. I came here, as formerly one went to live 'within the rules.' Let me, at least, have the benefit of the protection for condescending to the locality."

"Sir Stafford, my lady," said a servant, throwing open the door; and the old baronet entered hastily, and, without deigning to notice Lord Norwood, walked straight up to Lady Hester, and said a few words in a low voice.

Affecting to occupy himself with the books upon the table, Norwood watched the dialogue with keen but stealthy glances, and then, as the other turned suddenly round, said,—

"How d'ye do, Sir Stafford? I am glad to see you looking so well."

"I thank you, my lord; I am perfectly well," said he, with a most repelling coldness.

"You are surprised to see me in Florence, for certain," said the other, with a forced laugh.

"Very much surprised to see you *here*, my lord," was the abrupt reply.

"Ha! ha! ha! I thought so!" cried Norwood, laughing, and pretending not to feel the point of the remark. "But, now-a-days, one flits about the world in slippers and dressing-gown, and travelling inflicts no fatigue. I only left England ten days ago."

"The post comes in seven, my lord," said Sir Stafford. "I have had letters this morning, written this day week, and which give the last events in Town Life up to the very hour."

"Indeed! and what's the news, then?" said he, negligently.

"If your lordship will favour me with your company for a few minutes, I may be able to enlighten you," said Sir Stafford, moving towards the door.

"With the greatest pleasure. Good-bye, Lady Hester," said he, rising. "You said seven o'clock dinner, I think?"

"Yes," replied she, but in a voice almost inarticulate from shame and terror.

"Now, Sir Stafford, I'm at your orders," said the viscount, gaily, as he left the room, followed by the old man,

whose crimson cheek and flashing eye bespoke the passion which was struggling within him.

Of the two who now entered Sir Stafford's library, it must be owned that Lord Norwood was, by many degrees, the more calm and collected. No one, to have looked at him, could possibly have supposed that any question of interest, not to say of deep moment, awaited him; and as he carried his eyes over the well-filled shelves and the handsome fittings of the chamber, nothing could be more naturally spoken than the few complimentary expressions on Sir Stafford's good taste and judgment.

"I shall not ask you to be seated, my lord," said the old baronet, whose tremulous lip and shaking cheek showed how deep-felt was his agitation. "The few moments of interview I have requested will be, I have no doubt, too painful to either of us, nor could we desire to prolong them. To me, I own, they are very, very painful."

These hurried, broken, and unconnected sentences, fell from him as he searched for a letter among a number of others that littered the table.

Lord Norwood bowed coldly, and, without making any reply, turned his back to the fire, and waited in patience.

"I have, I fear, mislaid the letter," said Sir Stafford, whose nervous anxiety had now so completely mastered him that he threw the letters and papers on every side without perceiving it.

The viscount made no sign, but suffered the search to proceed without remark.

"It was a letter from Lord Effingdale," continued the baronet, still busied in the pursuit—"a letter written after the Newmarket settling, my lord; and, if I should be unfortunate enough not to find it, I must only trust to my memory for its contents."

Lord Norwood gave another bow, slighter and colder than the former, as though to say that he acquiesced perfectly, without knowing in what.

"Ah! here it is! here it is!" cried Sir Stafford, at last detecting the missing document, which he hastily opened and ran his eyes over. "This letter, my lord," continued he, "announces that, in consequence of certain defalca-

tions on your part, the members of the 'Whip Club' have erased your lordship's name from their list, and declared you incapacitated from either entering a horse, or naming a winner for the stakes in future. There, there, my lord, is the paragraph, coupled with what you will doubtless feel to be a very severe, but just comment on the transaction."

Norwood took the letter and read it leisurely—as leisurely and calmly as though the contents never concerned him, and then, folding it up, laid it on the chimney-piece beside him.

"Poor Effingdale!" said he, smiling; "he ought to spell better, considering that his mother was a governess. He writes '*naming*' with an 'e.' Didn't you remark that?"

But, as Sir Stafford paid no attention to the criticism, he went on:—

"As to the 'Whip,' I may as well tell you, that I scratched my own name, myself. They are a set of low 'Legs,' and, except poor Effy, and two or three others of the same brilliant stamp, not a gentleman amongst them."

"The defalcation is, however, true?" asked Sir Stafford.

"If you mean to ask whether a man always wins at Doncaster or Newmarket, the question is of the easiest to answer."

"I certainly presume that he always pays what he loses, my lord," replied Sir Stafford, colouring at the evasive impertinence of the other.

"Of course he does, when he has it, Sir Stafford; but that is a most essential condition, for the 'Turf' is not precisely like a mercantile pursuit."

Sir Stafford winced under the flippant insolence with which this was spoken.

"There is not exactly a fair way to calculate profit, nor any assurance against accidental loss. A horse, Sir Stafford, is not an Indiaman; a betting man is, therefore, in a position quite exceptional."

"If a man risks what he cannot pay, he is dishonourable," said Sir Stafford, in a short, abrupt tone.

"I see that you cannot enter into a theme so very different from all your habits and pursuits. You think there

is a kind of bankruptcy when a man gets a little behind with his bets. You don't see that all these transactions are on 'honour,' and that if one does 'bolt,' he means to 'book up' another time. There was George, your own son——"

"What of him?—what of George?" cried Sir Stafford, with a convulsive grasp of the chair, while the colour fled from his cheek, and he seemed ready to faint with emotion.

"Oh, nothing in the world to cause you uneasiness. A more honourable fellow never breathed than George."

"Then, what of him? How comes his name to your lips at such a discussion as this? Tell me, this instant, my lord. I command—I entreat you!"

And the old man shook like one in an ague; but Norwood saw his vantage ground, and determined to use it unsparingly. He therefore merely smiled, and said,—

"Pray be calm, Sir Stafford. I repeat, that there is nothing worthy of a moment's chagrin. I was only about to observe, that if I had the same taste for scandal-writing as poor Effy, I might have circulated a similar story about your son George. He left England, owing me a good round sum, for which, by the way, I was terribly 'hard up;' and although the money was paid eventually, what would you have thought of *me*—what would the world have thought of *him*—if I had written such an epistle as this?"

And, as he spoke, his voice and manner warmed into a degree of indignant anger, in which, as if carried away, he snatched the letter from the chimney-piece and threw it into the fire. The act was unseen by Sir Stafford, who sat with his head deeply buried between his hands, a low faint groan alone bespeaking the secret agony of his heart.

"My son has, then, paid you? He owes nothing, my lord?" said he, at last, looking up, with a countenance furrowed by agitation.

"Like a trump!" said Norwood, assuming the most easy and self-satisfied manner. "My life upon George Onslow! Back him to any amount, and against the field anywhere! A true John Bull!—no humbug, no nonsense about *him!*—straightforward and honourable, always!"

"Your position is, then, this, my lord," said Sir Stafford, whose impatience would not permit him to listen longer—"you have quitted England, leaving for future settlement a number of debts, for which you have not the remotest prospect of liquidation."

"Too fast—you go too fast!" said the viscount, laughing.

"Lord Effingdale writes the amount at thirty thousand pounds, and adds that, as a defaulter——"

"There's the whole of it," broke in Norwood. "You ring the changes about that one confounded word, and there is no use in attempting a vindication. 'Give a dog a bad name,' as the adage says. Now, I took the trouble this very morning to go over the whole of this tiresome business with George. I explained to him fully, and, I hope, to his entire satisfaction, that I was simply unfortunate in it—nothing more. A man cannot always 'ride the winner;' I'm sure I wish *I* could. Of course, I don't mean to say that it's not a confounded 'bore' to come out here and live in such a place as this, and just at the opening of the season, too, when town is beginning to fill; but, 'needs must,' we are told, 'when a certain gent sits on the coach-box.'"

Sir Stafford stood, during the whole of this speech, with his arms folded and his eyes fixed upon the floor. He never heard one word of it, but was deeply intent upon his own thoughts. At length he spoke in a full, collected, and firm voice: "Lord Norwood—I am, as you have told me, perfectly unfitted to pronounce upon transactions so very unlike every pursuit in which my life has been passed. I am alike ignorant of the feelings of those who engage in them, and of the rules of honour by which they are guided; but this I know, that the man whom his equals decline to associate with at home is not recognizable abroad; and that he who leaves his country with shame, cannot reside away from it with credit."

"This would be a very rude speech, Sir Stafford Onslow, even with the palliative preface of your ignorance, if our relative ages admitted any equality between us. I am the least bellicose of men—I believe I can say I may afford to be so. So long, therefore, as you confine such

sentiments to yourself, I will never complain of them; but if the time comes that you conceive they should be issued for general circulation——"

"Well, my lord, what then?"

"Your son must answer for it—that's all!" said Norwood; and he drew himself up, and fixed his eye steadily on the distant wall of the room, with a look and gesture that made the old man sick at heart. Norwood saw how "his shot told," and, turning hastily round, said: "This interview, I conclude, has lasted quite long enough for either of us. If you have any further explanations to seek for, let them come through a younger man, and in a more regular form. Good morning."

Sir Stafford bowed, without speaking, as the other passed out.

To have seen them both at that moment, few would have guessed aright on which side lay all the disgrace, and where the spirit of rectitude and honour.

Sir Stafford, indeed, was most miserable. If the viscount's mock explanations did not satisfy a single scruple of *his* mind, was it not possible they might have sufficed with others more conversant with such matters? Perhaps he is not worse than others of his own class. What would be his feelings if he were to involve George in a quarrel for such a cause? This was a consideration that pressed itself in twenty different forms, each of them enough to appall him. "But the man is a defaulter; he has fled from England with 'shame,'" was the stubborn conviction which no efforts of his casuistry could banish; and the more he reflected on this, the less possible seemed anything like evasion or compromise.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE END OF THE FIRST ACT."

THE point discussed in our last chapter, if not a momentous one in itself, was destined to exercise a very important influence upon the fortunes of the Onslow family. The interview between Sir Stafford and the viscount scarcely occupied five minutes; after which the baronet wrote a note of some length to her ladyship, to which she as promptly replied; a second, and even a third interchange of correspondence followed. The dinner-party appointed for that day was put off; a certain ominous kind of silence pervaded the house. The few privileged visitors were denied admission. Mr. Proctor, Sir Stafford's man, wore a look of more than common seriousness. Mademoiselle Célestine's glances revealed a haughty sense of triumph. Even the humbler menials appeared to feel that something had occurred, and betrayed in their anxious faces some resemblance to that vague sense of half-curiosity, half-terror, the passengers of a steamboat experience when an accident, of whose nature they know nothing, has occurred to the machinery.

Their doubts and suspicions assumed more shape when the order came that Sir Stafford would dine in the library, and her ladyship in her own room, George Onslow alone appearing in the dining-room. There was an air of melancholy over everything, the silence deepening as night came on. Servants went noiselessly to and fro, drew the curtains, and closed the doors with a half-stealthy gesture, and seemed as though fearful of awakening some slumbering outbreak of passion.

We neither have, nor desire to have, secrets from our readers. We will therefore proceed to Sir Stafford's dressing-room, where the old baronet sat moodily over the fire, his anxious features and sorrow-struck expression

showing the ravages even a few hours of suffering had inflicted. His table was littered with papers, parchments, and other formidable-looking documents. Some letters lay sealed here, others were half-written there; everything about him showed the conflict of doubt and indecision that was going on within his mind; and truly a most painful struggle was maintained there.

For some time back he had seen with displeasure the course of extravagance and waste of all his household; he had observed the habits of reckless expense with which his establishment was maintained; but, possessing a very ample fortune, and feeling that probably some change would be made with the coming summer, he had forborne to advert to it, and endured with what patience he could a mode of life whose very display was distasteful to him. Now, however, a more serious cause for anxiety presented itself, in the class of intimates admitted by Lady Hester to her society. Of the foreigners he knew comparatively little, but that little was not to their advantage. Some were wealthy voluptuaries, glad to propagate their own habits of extravagance among those they suspected of fortunes smaller than their own. Others were penniless adventurers, speculating upon everything that might turn to their profit. All were men of pleasure, and of that indolent, lounging, purposeless character so peculiarly unpleasing to those who have led active lives, and been always immersed in the cares and interests of business.

Such men, he rightly judged, were dangerous associates to his son, the very worst acquaintances for Kate, in whom already he was deeply interested, but still no actual stain of dishonour—no palpable flaw—could be detected in their fame, till the arrival of Lord Norwood added his name to the list.

To receive a man of whose misconduct in England he had acquired every proof, was a step beyond his endurance. Here or never must he take his stand; and manfully he did so. At first, by calm argument and remonstrance, and at last by firm resolution and determination. Without adverting to what had passed between the viscount and himself, the letter he addressed to Lady Hester conveyed his unalterable resolve not to know Lord Norwood.

Lady Hester's reply was not less peremptory, and scarcely as courteous. The correspondence continued with increasing warmth on both sides, till Sir Stafford palpably hinted at the possible consequences of a spirit of discordance and disagreement so ill-adapted to conjugal welfare. Her ladyship caught up the suggestion with avidity, and professed that, whatever scruples his delicacy might feel, to hers there was none in writing the word—"Separation."

If the thought had already familiarized itself to his mind, the word had not; and strange it is, that the written syllables should have a power and meaning that the idea itself could never realize.

To men who have had little publicity in their lives, and that little always of an honourable nature, there is no thought so poignantly miserable as the dread of a scandalous notoriety. To associate their names with anything that ministers to gossip—to make them tea-table talk—still worse, to expose them to sneering and impertinent criticisms, by revealing the secrets of their domesticity, is a torture to which no mere physical suffering has anything to compare. Sir Stafford Onslow was a true representative of this class of feeling. The sight of his name in the list of directors of some great enterprise, as the patron of a charity, the governor of an hospital, or the donor to an institution, was about as much of newspaper notoriety as he could bear without a sense of shrinking delicacy; but to become the mark for public discussion in the relations of his private life—to have himself and his family brought up to the bar of that terrible ordeal, where bad tongues are the eloquent, and evil speakers are the witty, was a speculation too terrible to think over; and this was exactly what Lady Hester was suggesting!

Is it not very strange that woman, with whose nature we inseparably and truly associate all those virtues that take their origin in refinement and modesty, should sometimes be able to brave a degree of publicity to which a man, the very hardiest and least shamefaced, would succumb, crestfallen and abashed; that her timid delicacy, her shrinking bashfulness, can be so hardened by the world, that she can face a notoriety where every look is an indictment, and every whisper a condemnation?

Now, if Lady Hester was yet remote from this, she had still journeyed one stage of the road. She had abundant examples around her of those best received and best looked on in society, whose chief claim to the world's esteem seemed to be the contempt with which they treated all its ordinances. There was a dash of heroism in their effrontery that pleased her; they appeared more gay, more buoyant, more elastic in spirits than other people; their increased liberty seemed to impart enlarged and more generous views, and they were always "good-natured," since, living in the very glassiest of houses, they never "shied" a pebble.

While, then, Sir Stafford sat overwhelmed with shame and sorrow at the bare thought of the public discussion that awaited him, Lady Hester was speculating upon condolences here, approbation there, panegyrics upon her high spirit, and congratulations upon her freedom. The little, half-shadowy allusions her friends would throw out from time to time upon the strange unsuitableness of her marriage with a man so much her senior, would soon be converted into comments of unrestricted license. Besides —and perhaps the greatest charm of all was—she would have a grievance; not the worn-out grievance of some imaginary ailment that nobody believes in but the "doctor" —not the mock agonies of a heart complaint, that saves the sufferer from eating bad dinners in vulgar company, but always allows them a respite for a *déjeûner* at the court or a supper after the Opera with a few chosen *convives* —but a real, substantial grievance, over which men might be eloquent and ladies pathetic. Such were the different feelings with which two persons contemplated the same event. Sir Stafford's thoughts turned instantly towards England. What would be said there by all those friends who had endeavoured to dissuade him from this ill-suited union? Their sorrowful compassion was even less endurable than the malice of others; and Grounsell, too—what would his old friend think of a catastrophe so sudden? In his heart, Sir Stafford was glad that the doctor was absent; much as he needed his counsel and advice, he still more dreaded the terror of his triumphant eye at the accomplishment of his oft-repeated prediction.

From George he met no support whatever. He either believed, or thought that he believed, Norwood's garbled explanation. Intercourse with a certain set of "fast men" had shown him that a man might do a "screwy" thing now and then, and yet not be cut by his acquaintance; and the young Guardsman deemed his father's rigid notions nothing but prejudices—very excellent and commendable ones, no doubt, but as inapplicable to our present civilization as would be a coat of mail or a back-piece of chain-armour. George Onslow, therefore, halted between the two opinions. Adhering to his father's side from feelings of affection and respect, he was drawn to Lady Hester's by his convictions; not, indeed, aware how formidable the difference had already become between them, and that, before that very night closed in, they had mutually agreed upon a separation, which, while occupying the same house, was essentially to exclude all intercourse.

One consideration gave Sir Stafford much painful thought. What was to become of Kate Dalton in this new turn of affairs? The position of a young girl on a visit with a family living in apparent unity and happiness was very wide apart from her situation as the companion of a woman separated, even thus much, from her husband. It would be equally unfair to her own family, as unjust to the girl herself, to detain her then in such a conjuncture. And yet what was to be done? Apart from all the unpleasantness of proposing an abrupt return to her home, came the thought of the avowal that must accompany the suggestion—the very confession he so dreaded to make. Of course the gossiping of servants would soon circulate the rumour. But then they might not spread it beyond the Alps, nor make it the current talk of a German watering-place. Thus were his selfish feelings at war with higher and purer thoughts. But the struggle was not a long one. He sat down and wrote to Lady Hester. Naturally assuming that all the reasons which had such force for himself would weigh equally with her, he dwelt less upon the arguments for Kate's departure than upon the mode in which it might be proposed and carried out. He adverted with feeling to the sacrifice the loss would inflict

upon Lady Hester, but professed his conviction in the belief that all merely selfish considerations would give way before higher and more important duties.

"As it is," said he, "I fear much that we have done anything but conduce to this dear girl's welfare and happiness. We have shown her glimpses of a life whose emptiness she cannot appreciate, but by whose glitter she is already attracted. We have exposed her to all the seductions of flattery, pampering a vanity which is perhaps her one only failing. We have doubtless suggested to her imagination dreams of a future never to be realized, and we must now consign her to a home where all the affections of fond relatives will be unequal to the task of blinding her to its poverty and its obscurity. And yet even this is better than to detain her here. It shall be my care to see in what way I can—I was about to write 'recompense,' nor would the word be unsuitable—recompense Mr. Dalton for the injury we have done him as regards his child; and if you have any suggestion to make me on this head, I will gladly accept it."

The note concluded with some hints as to the manner of making the communication to Kate, the whole awkwardness of which Sir Stafford, if need were, would take upon himself.

The whole temper of the letter was feeling and tender. Without even in the most remote way adverting to what had occurred between Lady Hester and himself, he spoke of their separation simply in its relation to Kate Dalton, for whom they were both bound to think and act with caution. As if concentrating every thought upon *her*, he did not suffer any other consideration to interfere. Kate, and Kate only, was all its theme.

Lady Hester, however, read the lines in a very different spirit. She had just recovered from a mesmeric trance, into which, to calm her nervous exaltation, her physician, Dr. Buccellini, had thrown her. She had been lying in a state of half-hysterical apathy for some hours, all volition —almost all vitality—suspended, under the influence of an exaggerated credulity, when the letter was laid upon the table.

"What is that your maid has just left out of her hand?" asked the doctor in a tone of semi-imperiousness.

"A letter—a sealed letter," replied she, mystically waving her hand before her half-closed eyes.

The doctor gave a look of triumph at the bystanders, and went on:

"Has the letter come from a distant country, or from a correspondent near at hand?"

"Near!" said she, with a shudder.

"Where is the writer at this moment?" asked he.

"In the house," said she, with another and more violent shuddering.

"I now take the letter in my hand," said the doctor, "and what am I looking at?"

"A seal with two griffins supporting a spur."

The doctor showed the letter on every side, with a proud and commanding gesture. "There is a name written in the corner of the letter, beneath the address. Do you know that name?"

A heavy, thick sob was the reply.

"There—there—be calm, be still," said he, majestically motioning with both hands towards her; and she immediately became composed and tranquil. "Are the contents of this letter such as will give you pleasure?"

A shake of the head was the answer.

"Are they painful?"

"Very painful," said she, pressing her hand to her temples.

"Will these tidings be productive of grand consequences?"

"Yes, yes!" cried she eagerly.

"What will you do, when you read them?"

"Act!" ejaculated she, solemnly.

"In compliance with the spirit, or in rejection?"

"Rejection!"

"Sleep on—sleep on," said the doctor, with a wave of his hand; and, as he spoke, her head drooped, her arm fell listlessly down, and her long and heavy breathing denoted deep slumber. "There are people, Miss Dalton," said he to Kate, "who affect to see nothing in mesmerism but deception and trick, whose philosophy teaches them to discredit all that they cannot comprehend. I trust you may never be of this number."

"It is very wonderful, very strange," said she, thoughtfully.

"Like all the secrets of nature, its phenomena are above belief; yet, to those who study them with patience and industry, how compatible do they seem with the whole order and spirit of creation. The great system of vitality being a grand scheme of actionary and reactionary influences, the centrifugal being in reality the centripetal, and those impulses we vainly fancy to be our own instincts being the impressions of external forces. Do you comprehend me?"

"Not perfectly; in part, perhaps," said she, diffidently.

"Even that is something," replied he, with a bland smile. "One whose future fortunes will place her in a station to exert influence is an enviable convert to have brought to truth."

"I!" said she, blushing with shame and surprise together; "surely you mistake, sir; I am neither born to rank, nor like to attain it."

"Both one and the other, young lady," said he solemnly; "high as your position will one day be, it will not be above the claims of your descent. It is not on fallible evidence that I read the future."

"And can you really predict my fortune in life?" asked she, eagerly.

"More certainly than you would credit it, when told," said he, deliberately.

"How I should like to hear it—how I should like to know——" She stopped, and a deep blush covered her face.

"And why should you not know that your dreams will be realized?" said he, hastily, as if speaking from some irresistible impulse. "What more natural than to desire a glance, fleeting though it be, into that black vista, where the bright lightning of prophecy throws its momentary splendour?"

"And how know you that I have had dreams?" said she, innocently.

"I know of them but by their accomplishment. I see you not in the present or the past, but in the future. There your image is revealed to me, and surrounded by a splen-

dour I cannot describe. It is gorgeous and barbaric in magnificence; there is something feudal in the state by which you are encompassed that almost speaks of another age."

"This is mere dreamland indeed," said she, laughing.

"Nay, not so; nor is it all bright and glorious, as you think. There are shadows of many a dark tint moving along the sunlit surface."

"But how know you all this?" asked she, half incredulously.

"As you slept last evening in a mesmeric slumber on that sofa; but I will hear no further questioning. Look to our patient here, and if that letter agitate her overmuch, let me be sent for." And, with these words, delivered oracularly, the doctor left the room, while Kate seated herself beside the sofa where Lady Hester slept.

It was late in the night when Lady Hester awoke, and soon remembering that a letter had arrived, broke the seal and read it. If the proposal of Sir Stafford was in every way unacceptable, there was something which compensated for all in the excitement of spirits an act of opposition was sure to produce; nor was it without a sense of triumph that she read lines penned in evident sorrow and depression of spirit. In fact, she made the not uncommon error of mistaking sorrow for repentance, and thought she perceived in her husband's tone a desire to retrace his steps. It is difficult to say whether such an *amende* would have given her pleasure; certainly she would not have accepted it without subjecting him to a term of probation of more or less length. In any case, as regarded Kate, she was decided at once upon a positive refusal; and as, with *her*, a resolve and a mode of action were usually the work of the same moment, she motioned to Kate to sit down beside her on the sofa, and passing her arm around her, drew her fondly towards her.

"Kate, dearest," said she, "I'm sure nothing would induce you to leave me—I mean, to desert and forsake me."

Kate pressed the hand she held in her own to her lips with fervour, but could not speak for emotion.

"I say this," said Lady Hester, rapidly, "because the moment has come to test your fidelity. Sir Stafford and

I—it is needless to state how and by what means—have at last discovered, what I fancy the whole world has seen for many a day, that we were totally unsuited to each other, in taste, age, habit, feeling, mode of life, and thought; that we have nothing in common, neither liking nor detesting the same things, but actually at variance upon every possible subject and person. Of course all attempt to cover such discrepancies must be a failure. We might trump up a hollow truce, child, but it never could be an alliance; and so we have thought—I'm sure it is well that we have hit upon even one topic for agreement—we have thought that the best, indeed the only, thing we could do, was—to separate."

An exclamation, almost like an accent of pain, escaped Kate at these words.

"Yes, dearest," resumed Lady Hester, "it was his own proposal, made in the very coldest imaginable fashion; for men have constantly this habit, and always take the tone of dignity when they are about to do an injustice. All this, however, I was prepared for, and could suffer without complaint; but he desires to rob me of you, my dear child—to deprive me of the only friend, the only confidante I have in the world. I don't wonder that you grow pale and look shocked at such cruelty, concealed, as it is, under the mask of care for your interests and regard for your welfare; and this to *me*, dearest—to me, who feel to you as to a sister—a dear, dear sister!" Here Lady Hester drew Kate towards her, and kissed her twice affectionately. "There's his letter, my sweet child; you can read it; or better, indeed, that you should not, if you would preserve any memory of your good opinion of him."

"And he that was ever so kind, so thoughtful, and so generous!" cried Kate.

"You know nothing of these creatures, my dear," broke in Lady Hester. "All those plausibilities that they play off in the world are little emanations of their own selfish natures. They are eternally craving admiration from us women, and that is the true reason of their mock kindness and mock generosity! I'm sure," added she, sighing, "*my* experience has cost me pretty dearly! What a life of trial and privation has mine been!"

Lady Hester sighed heavily as her jewelled fingers pressed to her eyes a handkerchief worth a hundred guineas, and really believed herself a case for world-wide sympathy. She actually did shed a tear or two over her sorrows, for it is wonderful on what slight pretension we can compassionate ourselves! She thought over all the story of her life, and wept! She remembered how she had been obliged to refuse the husband of her choice; she forgot to be grateful for having escaped a heartless spendthrift; she remembered her acceptance of one inferior to her in rank, and many years her senior; but forgot his wealth, his generosity, his kindliness of nature, and his high character. She thought of herself as she was at eighteen—the flattered beauty, daughter of a Peer, courted, sought after, and admired; but she totally forgot what she was at thirty, with faded attractions, unthought of, and, worse still, unmarried. Of the credit side of her account with Fortune she omitted not an item; the debits she slurred over as unworthy of mention. That she should be able to deceive herself is nothing very new or strange, but that she should succeed in deceiving another is indeed singular; and such was the case. Kate listened to her, and believed everything; and when her reason failed to convince, her natural softness of disposition served to satisfy her that a more patient, long-suffering, unrepining being never existed than Lady Hester Onslow.

"And now," said she, after a long peroration of woes, "can you leave me here, alone and friendless?—will you desert me?"

"Oh, never, never!" cried Kate, kissing her hand and pressing her to her heart. "I would willingly lay down my life to avert this sad misfortune; but, if that cannot be, I will share your lot with the devotion of my whole heart."

Lady Hester could scarcely avoid smiling at the poor girl's simplicity, who really fancied that separation included a life of seclusion and sorrow, with restricted means and an obscure position; and it was with a kind of subdued drollery she assured Kate that even in her altered fortunes a great number of little pleasures and comforts would remain for them. In fact, by degrees the

truth came slowly out, that the great change implied little else than unrestrained liberty of action, freedom to go anywhere, know any one, and be questioned by nobody. The equivocal character of the position adding a piquancy to the society, inexpressibly charming to all those who, like the Duchesse d'Abrantes, think it only necessary for a thing to be "wrong" to make it perfectly delightful.

Having made a convert of Kate, Lady Hester briefly replied to Sir Stafford, that his proposition was alike repugnant to Miss Dalton as to herself—that she regretted the want of consideration on his part, which could have led him to desire that she should be friendless at a time when the presence of a companion was more than ever needed. This done, she kissed Kate three or four times affectionately, and retired to her room, well satisfied with what the day had brought forth, and only wishing for the morrow, which should open her new path in life.

It often happens in life that we are never sufficiently struck with the force of our own opinions or their consequences, till, from some accident or other, we come to record them. Then it is that the sentiments we have expressed, and the lines of action adopted, suddenly come forth in all their unvarnished truth. Like the images which the painter, for the first time, commits to canvas, they stand out to challenge a criticism which, so long as they remained in mere imagination, they had escaped.

This was precisely Kate Dalton's case now. Her natural warm-heartedness, and her fervent sense of gratitude, had led her to adopt Lady Hester's cause as her own; generous impulses, carrying reason all before them, attached her to what she fancied to be the weaker side. "The divinity that doth hedge" "beauty" made her believe that so much loveliness could do no wrong; nor was it till she came to write of the event to her sister, that even a doubt crossed her mind on the subject. The difficulty of explaining a circumstance of which she knew but little, was enhanced by her knowledge of Ellen's rigid and unbending sense of right. "Poor dear Nelly," said she, "with her innocence of mind, will understand nothing of all this, or she will condemn Lady Hester at once. Submission to her husband would, in her opinion, have

been the first of duties. She cannot appreciate motives which actuate society in a rank different from her own. In her ignorance of the world, too, she might deem my remaining here unadvisable; she might counsel my return to home; and thus I should be deserting, forsaking, the dear friend who has confided all her sorrows to my heart, and reposes all her trust in my fidelity. This would break Lady Hester's heart and my own together; and yet nothing is more likely than such a course. Better a thousand times not expose her friend's cause to such a casualty. A little time and a little patience may place matters in a position more intelligible and less objectionable; and, after all, the question is purely a family secret, the divulgence of which, even to a sister, is perhaps not warrantable."

Such were among the plausibilities with which she glanced over her conduct; without, however, satisfying herself that she was in the right. She had only begun the descent of lax morality, and her head was addled by the new sensation. Happy are they who even from weak nerves relinquish the career!

Kate's letter home, then, was full of gay revelations. Galleries, churches, gardens; objects of art or historic interest; new pictures of manners, sketches of society, abounded. There were descriptions of *fêtes*, too, and brilliant assemblies, with great names of guests and gorgeous displays of splendour. Well and sweetly were they written; a quick observation and a keen insight into character in every line. The subtle analysis of people and their pretensions, which comes of mixture with the world, was pre-eminent in all she said; while a certain sharp wit pointed many of the remarks, and sparkled in many a brilliant passage.

It was altogether a lively and a pleasant letter. A stranger, reading it, would have pronounced the writer clever and witty; a friend would have regretted the want of personal details, the hundred little traits of egoism, that speak confidence and trust. But to a sister! and such a sister as Nelly! it was, indeed, barren! No outpouring of warm affection; no fond memory of home; no reference to that little fireside, whence her own image had

never departed, and where her presence was each night invoked.

Oh! Kate, has Hanserl's dark prophecy thrown its shadow already to your feet? Can a young heart be so easily corrupted, and so soon?

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SMALL DINNER AT THE VILLINO ZOE.

Among the penalties great folk pay for their ascendancy, there is one most remarkable, and that is, the intenes interest taken in all their affairs by hundreds of worthy people who are *not* of their acquaintance. This feeling, which transcends every other known description of sympathy, flourishes in small communities. In the capital of which we are now speaking, it was at its very highest pitch of development. The Onslows furnished all the table-talk of the city; but in no circle were their merits so frequently and ably discussed as in that little parliament of gossip which held its meetings at the "Villion Zoe."

Mrs. Ricketts, who was no common diplomatist, had done her utmost to establish relations of amity with her great neighbour. She had expended all the arts of courtesy and all the devices of politeness to effect this *entente cordiale;* but all in vain. Her advances had been met with coldness, and "something more;" her perfumed little notes, written in a style of euphuism all her own, had been left unanswered; her presents of fruit and flowers unacknowledged—it is but fair to add, that they never proceeded further than the porter's lodge—even her

visiting-cards were only replied to by the stiff courtesy of cards, left by Lady Hester's "Chasseur;" so that, in fact, failure had fallen on all her endeavours, and she had not even attained to the barren honour of a recognition as they passed in the promenade.

This was a very serious discomfiture, and might, when it got abroad, have sorely damaged the Ricketts' ascendancy in that large circle, who were accustomed to regard her as the glass of fashion. Heaven knew what amount of insubordination might spring out of it! what rebellious notions might gain currency and credit! It was but the winter before when a Duchess, who passed through, on her way to Rome, asked "who Mrs. Ricketts was?" and the shock was felt during the whole season after. The Vandyk for whose authenticity Martha swore, was actually called in question. The "Sèvres" cup she had herself painted, was the subject of a heresy as astounding. We live in an age of movement and convulsion—no man's landmarks are safe now—and Mrs. Ricketts knew this.

The Onslows, it was clear, would not know *her;* it only remained, then, to show why she would not know *them.* It was a rare thing to find a family settling down at Florence against whom a "true bill" might not easily be found of previous misconduct. Few left England without a reason that might readily become an allegation. Bankruptcy or divorce were the light offences; the higher ones we must not speak of. Now the Onslows, as it happened, were not in this category. Sir Stafford's character was unimpeachable—her ladyship's had nothing more grave against it than the ordinary levities of her station. George "had gone the pace," it was true, but nothing disreputable attached to him. There was no use, therefore, in "trying back" for a charge, and Mrs. Ricketts perceived that they must be arraigned on the very vaguest of evidence. Many a head has fallen beneath the guillotine for a suspicion, and many a heart been broken on a surmise!

A little dinner at the Villino opened the plan of proceedings. It was a small *auto-da-fé* of character at which the Onslows were to be the victims, while the grand inquisitors were worthily represented by the Polish

Count, Haggerstone, Purvis, and a certain Mr. Foglass, then passing through Florence on his way to England. This gentleman, who was the reputed son of a supposed son of George the Fourth, was received as "very good royalty" in certain circles abroad, and, by virtue of a wig, a portly chest, and a most imposing pomposity of manner, taken to be exceedingly like his grandfather—just on the same principle as red currant jelly makes middling mutton resemble venison.

To get rid of his importunity, a Minister had made him Consul in some remote village of the East, but finding that there were neither fees nor perquisites, Foglass had left his post to besiege the doors of Downing-street once more, and if rejected as a suppliant, to become an admirable grievance for a Radical Member, and a "very cruel case of oppression" for the morning papers.

Foglass was essentially a "humbug;" but, unlike most, if not all other humbugs, without the smallest ingredient of any kind of ability. When men are said to live by their wits, their capital is generally speaking a very sufficient one; and that interesting class of persons known as adventurers, numbers many clever talkers, shrewd observers, subtle tacticians, and admirable billiard-players; with a steady hand on a pistol, but ready to "pocket" either an "insult" or a "ball," if the occasion require it. None of these gifts pertained to Foglass. He had not one of the qualities which either succeed in the world or in society, and yet, strange to say, this intolerable bore had a kind of popularity, that is to say, people gave him a vacant place at their dinners, and remembered him at picnics.

His whole strength lay in his wig, and a certain slow, measured intonation which he found often attracted attention to what he said, and gave his tiresome anecdotes of John Kemble, Munden, and Mathews the semblance of a point they never possessed. Latterly, however, he had grown deaf, and, like most who suffer under that infirmity, taken to speaking in a whisper so low as to be inaudible—a piece of politeness for which even our reader will be grateful, as it will spare him the misery of his twaddle.

Haggerstone and he were intimates—were it not a profanation of the word, we should say friends. They were, however, always together; and Haggerstone took pains to speak of his companion as a "monstrous clever fellow, who required to be known to be appreciated." Jekyl probably discovered the true secret of the alliance in the fact that they always talked to each other about the nobility, and never gave them their titles—an illusory familiarity with Dukes and Earls that appeared to render them supremely happy. Richmond, Beaufort, Cleveland, and Stanley were in their mouths as "household words."

After all, it was a harmless sort of pastime; and if these "Imaginary Conversations" gave them pleasure, why need we grumble?

We have scruples about asking our reader even to a description of the Ricketts' dinner. It was a true Barmecide feast. There was a very showy bouquet of flowers: there was a lavish display of what seemed silver; there was a good deal of queer china and impracticable glass; in short, much to look at, and very little to eat. Of this fact the Pole's appreciation was like an instinct, and as the *entrées* were handed round, all who came after him became soon aware of. Neither the wine nor the dessert were temptations to a long sitting, and the party soon found themselves in the drawing-room.

"Son Excellence is going to England?" said the Pole, addressing Foglass, who had been announced as an Ambassador; "if you do see de Count Ojeffskoy, tell him I am living here, as well as a poor exile can, who have lost palaces, and horses, and diamonds, and all de rest."

"Ah! the poor dear Count!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, while Martha prolonged the echo.

"You carry on the war tolerably well, notwithstanding," said Haggerstone, who knew something of the other's resources in *piquet* and *écarté*.

"Carry on de war!" rejoined he, indignantly; "wid my fader, who work in de mines; and my beautiful sisters, who walk naked about de streets of Crakow!"

"What kind of climate have they in Crak-Crak-Crak——" A fit of coughing finished a question which

nobody thought of answering; and Purvis sat down, abashed, in a corner.

"Arthur, my love," said Mrs. Ricketts—she was great at a diversion, whenever such a tactic was wanted—"do you hear what Colonel Haggerstone has been saying?"

"No, dearest," muttered the old general, as he worked away with rule and compass.

"He tells me," said the lady, still louder, "that the Onslows have separated. Not an open, formal separation, but that they occupy distinct apartments, and hold no intercourse whatever."

"Sir Stafford lives on the *rez de chaussée*," said Haggerstone, who, having already told the story seven times the same morning, was quite perfect in the recital—"Sir Stafford lives on the *rez de chaussée*, with a small door into the garden. My lady retains the entire first floor and the grand conservatory. George has a small *garçon* apartment off the terrace."

"How very distressing!" sighed Mrs. Ricketts, whose woe-worn looks seemed to imply that she had never heard of a similar incident before; "and how unlike us, Arthur!" added she, with a smile of beaming affection. "He has ever been what you see him, since the day he stole my young, unsuspecting heart."

The Colonel looked over at the object thus designated, and, by the grin of malice on his features, appeared to infer that the compliment was but a sorry one, after all.

"'John Anderson my Jo, John,'" muttered he, half aloud.

"'We've climbed the hill toge-ge-ge-ther,'" chimed in Purvis, with a cackle.

"Gather what, sir? Blackberries, was it?" cried Haggerstone.

"Don't quote that low-lived creature," said Mrs. Ricketts; "a poet only conversant with peasants and their habits. Let us talk of our own order. What of these poor Onslows?"

"Sir Stafford dines at two, madam. A cutlet, a vegetable, and a cherry tart; two glasses of Gordon's sherry, and a cup of coffee."

"Without milk. I had it from Proctor," broke in

Purvis, who was bursting with jealousy at the accuracy of the other's narrative.

"You mean without sugar, sir," snapped Haggerstone. "Nobody does take milk-coffee after dinner."

"I always do," rejoined Purvis, "when I can't get mara-mara-mara——"

"I hope you can get maraschino down easier than you pronounce it, sir."

"Be quiet, Scroope," said his sister; "you always interrupt."

"He do make de devil of misverstandness wit his what-ye-call-'em," added the Pole, contemptuously.

And poor Purvis, rebuked on every side, was obliged to fall back beside Martha and her embroidery.

"My lady," resumed Haggerstone, "is served at eleven o'clock. The moment Granzini's solo is over in the ballet, an express is sent off to order dinner. The table is far more costly than Midchekoff's."

"I do believe well," said the count, who always, for nationality sake, deemed it proper to abuse the Russian. "De Midchekoff cook tell me he have but ten paoli—how you say—par tête—by the tête—for his dinner; dat to include everyting, from the caviar to de sheeze."

"That was not the style at the Pavilion formerly." roared out Haggerstone, repeating the remark in Foglass's ear.

And the ex-consul smiled blandly towards Mrs. Ricketts, and said "he'd take anything to England for her with pleasure."

"He's worse than ever," remarked Haggerstone, irritably. "When people have a natural infirmity, they ought to confine themselves to their own room."

"Particularly when it is one of the tem-tem-temper," said Purvis, almost choked with passion.

"Better a hasty temper than an impracticable tongue, sir," said Haggerstone.

"Be quiet, Scroope," added Mrs. Ricketts; and he was still. Then, turning to the colonel, she went on: "How thankful we ought to be that we never knew these people. They brought letters to us—some, indeed, from dear and valued friends. That sweet Diana Comerton, who mar-

ried the Duke of Ellswater, wrote a most pressing entreaty that I should call upon them."

"She didn't marry the duke; she married his chap-chaplain," chimed in Purvis.

"Will you be quiet, Scroope?" remarked the lady.

"I ought to know," rejoined he, grown courageous in the goodness of his cause. "He was Bob Nutty. Bitter Bob, we always called him at school. He had a kind of a poly-poly-poly——"

"A polyanthus," suggested Haggerstone.

"No. It was a poly-polypus—a polypus, that made him snuffle in his speech."

"Ach Gott!" sighed the Pole; but whether in sorrow for poor "Bob," or in utter weariness at his historian, was hard to say.

"Lady Foxington, too," said Mrs. Ricketts, "made a serious request that we should be intimate with her friend Lady Hester. She was candid enough to say that her ladyship would not suit *me*. 'She has no soul, Zoe,' wrote she, 'so I needn't say more.'"

"Dat is ver bad," said the Pole gravely.

"Still, I should have made her acquaintance, for the sake of that young creature—Miss Dalton, I think they call her—and whom I rather suspect to be a distant cousin of ours."

"Yes; there were Dawkinses at Exeter—a very respectable solicitor, one was, Joe Dawkins," came in Purvis; "and he used to say we were co-co-co-connections."

"This family, sir, is called Dalton, and not even a stutter can make that Dawkins."

"Couldn't your friend Mr. Foglass find out something about these Daltons for us, as he goes through Germany?" asked Mrs. Ricketts of the colonel.

"No one could execute such a commission better, madam, only you must give him his instructions in writing. Foglass," added he, at the top of his voice, "let me have your note-book for a moment."

"With pleasure," said he, presenting his snuff-box.

"No; your memorandum-book," screamed the other, louder.

"It's gone down," whispered the deaf man. "I lost the key on Tuesday last."

"Not your watch, man. I want to write a line in your note-book;" and he made a pantomimic of writing.

"Yes, certainly; if Mrs. R. will permit, I'll write to her with pleasure."

"Confound him!" muttered Haggerstone; and, taking up a visiting-card, he wrote on the back of it, "Could you trace the Daltons as you go back by Baden?"

The deaf man at once brightened up; a look of shrewd intelligence lighted up his fishy eyes as he said,—

"Yes, of course; say, what do you want?"

"Antecedents—family—fortune," wrote Haggerstone.

"If dey have de tin," chimed in the Pole.

"If they be moral and of irreproachable reputation," said Mrs. Ricketts.

"Are they related to the other Dawkinses?" asked Purvis. "Let him ask if their mother was not godfather to—no, I mean grandfather—to the Reverend Jere-Jere-Jere——"

"Be quiet, Scroope—will you be quiet?"

"There, you have it all, now," said Haggerstone, as he finished writing; "their 'family, fortune, flaws, and frailties'—'what they did, and where they did it'—observing accuracy as to Christian names, and as many dates as possible."

"I'll do it," said Foglass, as he read over the "instruction."

"We want it soon, too," said Mrs. Ricketts. "Tell him we shall need the information at once."

"This with speed," wrote Haggerstone at the foot of the memorandum.

Foglass bowed a deep assent.

"How like his grandfather!" said Mrs. Ricketts, in ecstacy.

"I never knew he had one," whispered Haggerstone to the Pole. "His father was a coachmaker in Long Acre."

"Is he not thought very like them?" asked Mrs. Ricketts, with a sidelong glance of admiration at the auburn peruke.

"I've heard that the wig is authentic, madam."

"He has so much of that regal urbanity in his manner."

"If he is not the first gentleman of England," muttered Haggerstone to himself, "he is the first one in his own family, at least."

"By the way," said Mrs. Ricketts, hastily, "let him inquire into that affair of Lord Norwood."

"No necessity, madam. The affair is in *Bell's Life*, with the significant question, 'Where is he?' But he can learn the particulars, at all events." And he made a note in the book.

"How dreadful all this, and how sad to think Florence should be the resort of such people!"

"If it were not for rapparees and refugees, madam, house-rent would be very inexpensive," said the colonel, in a subdued voice; while, turning to the Pole, he added, "and if respectability is to be always a caricature, I'd as soon have its opposite. I suppose you do not admit the viscount, madam?"

"He has not ventured to present himself," said Mrs. Ricketts, proudly. "I hope that there is, at least, one sanctuary where virtue can live unmolested." And, as she spoke, she looked over at Martha, who was working away patiently; but whether happy in the exclusive tariff aforesaid, or somewhat tired of "protection," we are unable to say.

"What has he do?" asked the count.

"He has done the 'ring' all round, I believe," said Haggerstone, chuckling at a joke which he alone could appreciate.

"Dey do talk of play in England!" said the Pole, contemptuously. "Dey never do play high, wit dere leetle—how do you call 'em?—bets, of tree, four guinea, at *écarté*. But in Polen we have two, tree, five tousand crowns on each card. Dere, crack! you lose a fortune, or I do win one! One evening at Garowidsky's I do lose one estate of seventeen million florins, but I no care noting for all dat! I was ver rich, wit my palaces and de mayorat—how you call dat?"

Before this question could be answered, the servant threw open the double door of the *salon*, and announced,

"Milordo Norwood!" A shell might have burst in the apartment and not created much more confusion. Mrs. Ricketts gave a look at Martha, as though to assure herself that she was in safety. Poor Martha's own fingers trembled as she bent over her frame. Haggerstone buttoned up his coat and arranged his cravat with the air of a man so consummate a tactician that he could actually roll himself in pitch and yet never catch the odour; while Purvis, whose dread of a duellist exceeded his fear of a mad dog, ensconced himself behind a stand of geraniums, where he resolved to live in a state of retirement until the terrible viscount had withdrawn. As for the count, a preparatory touch at his moustache, and a slight arrangement of his hair, sufficed him to meet anything; and as these were the ordinary details of his daily toilet, he performed them with a rapidity quite instinctive.

To present oneself in a room where one's appearance is unacceptable, is, perhaps, no slight test of tact, manner, and effrontery; to be actually indifferent to the feelings around is to be insensible to the danger; to see the peril, and yet appear not to notice it, constitutes the true line of action. Lord Norwood was perfect in this piece of performance, and there was neither exaggerated cordiality nor any semblance of constraint in his manner as he advanced to Mrs. Ricketts, and taking her hand, pressed it respectfully to his lips.

"This salutation," said he gaily, "is a commission from Lord Kennycroft, your old and constant admirer. It was his last word as we parted: 'Kiss Mrs. Ricketts's hand for me, and say I am faithful as ever.'"

"Poor dear lord! General, here is Lord Norwood come to see us."

"How good of him—how very kind! Just arrived from the East, my lord?" said he, shaking Foglass by the hand in mistake.

"No, sir; from Malta." He wouldn't say England, for reasons. "Miss Ricketts, I am most happy to see you—and still occupied with the fine arts? Haggy, how d'ye do? Really it seems to me like yesterday since I sat here last in this delightful arm-chair, and looked about me on

all these dear familiar objects. You've varnished the Correggio, I think?

"The Vandyk, my lord."

"To be sure—the Vandyk. How stupid I am. Indeed, Lady Foxington said that not all your culture would ever make anything of me."

"How is Charlotte?" asked Mrs. Ricketts—this being the familiar for Lady F.

"Just as you saw her last. Thinner, perhaps, but looking admirably."

"And the dear duke—how is he?"

"Gouty—always gouty—but able to be about."

"I am so glad to hear it. It is so refreshing to talk of old friends."

"They are always talking of you. I'm sure, 'Zoe'—forgive me the liberty—Zoe Ricketts is an authority on every subject of taste and literature."

"How did you come here, my lord?" whispered Haggerstone.

"The new opera broke down, and there is no house open before twelve," was the hasty reply.

"Is Jemima married, my lord?"

"No. There's something or other wrong about the settlements. Who's the foreigner, Haggy?"

"A Pole. Petrolaffsky."

"No, no—not a bit of it. *I* know him," said the other rapidly; then, turning to Mrs. Ricketts, he grew warmly interested in the private life and adventures of the nobility, for all of whom she entertained a most catholic affection.

It was, indeed, a grand field-day for the peerage; even to the "Pensioners" all were under arms. It was a review such as she rarely enjoyed, and certainly she "improved the occasion." She scattered about her noble personages with the profusion of a child strewing wild flowers. There were Dukes she had known from their cradles; Marchionesses with whom she had disported in childhood; Earls and Viscounts who had been her earliest playmates; not to speak of a more advanced stage in her history, when all these distinguished individuals were suppliants and suitors. To listen to her, you would swear that she had never played shuttlecock with anything

under an Earl, nor trundled a hoop with aught below a Lord in Waiting! Norwood fooled her to the top of her bent. To use his own phrase, "he left her easy hazards, and everything on the balls." It is needless to state that, in such pleasant converse, she had no memory for the noble viscount's own transgressions. He might have robbed the Exchequer, or stolen the Crown jewels, for anything that she could recollect! and when, by a seeming accident, he did allude to Newmarket, and lament his most "unlucky book," she smiled complacently, as though to say that he could afford himself even the luxury of being ruined, and not care for it.

"Florence is pretty much as it used to be, I suppose," said he; "and one really needs one's friends to rebut and refute foolish rumours, when they get abroad. Now, you'll oblige me by contradicting, if you ever hear, this absurd story. I neither did win forty thousand from the Duke of Stratton, nor shoot him in a duel for non-payment."—Both these derelictions were invented on the moment.—"You'll hear fifty other similar offences laid to my charge; and I trust to you and the Onslows for the refutation. In fact, it is the duty of one's own class to defend 'their order.'"

Mrs. Ricketts smiled blandly, and bowed—bowed as though her gauze turban had been a coronet, and the tinsel finery jewelled strawberry leaves! To be coupled with the Onslows in the defence of a viscount was a proud thought. What if it might be made a grand reality?

"*Apropos* of the Onslows, my lord," said she insidiously, "you are very intimate with them. How is it that we have seen so little of each other? Are we not congenial spirits?"

"Good Heavens! I thought you were like sisters. There never were people so made for each other. All your tastes, habits, associations—forgive me, if I say your very antipathies—are alike; for you both are unforgiving enemies of vulgarity. Depend upon it, there has been some underhand influence at work. Rely on't, that evil tongues have kept you apart." This he said in a whisper, and with a sidelong glance towards where Haggerstone sat at *écarté* with the Pole.

"Do you really think so?" asked she, reddening with anger, as she followed the direction of his eyes.

"I can hit upon no other solution of the mystery," said he, thoughtfully; "but know it I will, and must. You know, of course, that they can't endure him?"

"No, I never heard that."

"It is not mere dislike, it is actual detestation. I have striven to moderate the feeling. I have said, 'True enough the man is bad *ton*, but you needn't admit him to anything like intimacy. Let him come and go with the herd you receive at your large parties, and, above all, never repeat anything after him, for he has always the vulgar version of every incident in high life.'"

Mrs. Ricketts raised her arched eyebrows and looked astonished, but it was a feeling in which acquiescence was beautifully blended, and the viscount marked it well.

"You must tell me something of this Miss Dalton," said he, drawing his chair closer; "they affect a kind of mystery about her. Who is she? What is she?"

"There are various versions of her story abroad," said Mrs. Ricketts, who now spoke like the Chief Justice delivering a charge. "Some say that she is a natural daughter of Sir Stafford's; some aver that she is the last of a distinguished family, whose fortune was embezzled by the Onslows; others assert that she is a half-sister of Lady Hester's own; but who ought to know the truth better than you, my lord?"

"I know absolutely nothing. She joined them in Germany, but where, when, and how, I never heard."

"I'll soon be able to inform you, my lord, on every detail of the matter," said she, proudly. "Our kind friend, yonder, Mr. Foglass, has undertaken to discover everything. Mr. F.—will you touch his arm for me, Martha?" and, the gentleman being aroused to consciousness, now arose, and approached Mrs. Ricketts' chair—"may I be permitted to take a glance at your note-book?" This speech was accompanied by a pantomimic gesture which he quickly understood. "I wish to show you, my lord, "said she, addressing the viscount, "that we proceed most methodically in our searches after title, as I sometimes call it—ha! ha! ha! Now, here is

the precious little volume, and this will explain the degree of accuracy such an investigation demands. This comes of living abroad, my lord," added she, with a smile. "One never can be too cautious—never too guarded in one's intimacies! The number of dubious people one meets with—the equivocal characters that somehow obtain a footing in society—— Here, I really must ask you to decipher these ingenious hieroglyphics yourself." And she handed the book to his lordship.

He took it courteously at the spot she opened it, and, as his eyes fell upon the page, a slight—very slight—flush rose to his cheek, while he continued to read the lines before him more than once over. "Very explicit, certainly!" said he, while a smile of strange meaning curled his lip; and then, closing the book, he returned it to the lady's hand; not, however, before he had adroitly torn out the page he had been looking at, and which contained the following words:—"Norwood's affair—the precise story of the N. M. business—if cut in England, and scratched at the 'Whip.'" "I cannot sufficiently commend either your caution or your tact, Mrs. Ricketts," said he, bowing urbanely; "without a little scrutiny of this kind, our *salons* would be overrun with blacklegs and bad characters!"

It was now late—late enough for Lady Hester—and the viscount rose to take his leave. He was perfectly satisfied with the results of his visit. He had secretly enjoyed all the absurdities of his hostess, and even stored up some of her charming flights for repetition elsewhere; he had damaged Haggerstone, whose evil-speaking he dreaded, and, by impugning his good breeding, had despoiled him of all credit; he had seen the Polish Count in a society which, even such as it was, was many degrees above his pretensions, and, although they met without recognition, a masonic glance of intelligence had passed between them; and, lastly, he had made an ally of the dear Zoe herself, ready to swear to his good character, and vouch for the spotless honour of all his dealings on turf or card-table.

"Has he explained the Newmarket affair, madam?" said Haggerstone, as the door closed on the viscount's departure.

"Perfectly, colonel; there is not the shadow of a suspicion against him."

"And so he was not scr-scr-scratched at the 'Whip'?" cried Purvis, emerging from his leafy retreat.

"Nothing of the kind, Scroope."

"A scratch, but not a wound, perhaps," said Haggerstone, with a grin of malice.

"I am ver happy—please ver moosh," said the count, "for de sake of de order. I am republiquecain, but never forget I'm de noble blood!"

"Beautiful sentiment!" exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts, enthusiastically. "Martha, did you hear what the count said? General, I hope you didn't lose it?"

"I was alway for de cause of de people," said the count, throwing back his hair wildly, and seeming as if ready to do battle at a moment's warning.

"For an anti-monarchist, he turns up the king wonderfully often at *écarté*," said Haggerstone, in a low muttering, only overheard by Martha.

"I don't think the demo-demo-demo——" But before Purvis had finished his polysyllabic word, the company had time to make their farewell speeches and depart; indeed, as the servant came to extinguish the lamps, he found the patient Purvis very red in the face, and with other signs of excitement, deeply seated in a chair, and as if struggling against an access of suffocation.

What the profound sentiment which he desired to enunciate might therefore be, is lost to history, and this true narrative is unable to record.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE VISCOUNT'S VISION.

When Lord Norwood arrived at the Mazzarini Palace, he was surprised not to find the usual half-dozen carriages of the *habitués* drawn up in the court-yard, and still more so to learn that her ladyship did not receive that evening. He ascended to George Onslow's apartment, and discovered that he had dined with Prince Midchekoff, and not yet returned. Not knowing how to spend the hours, so much earlier than those of his usually retiring to rest, he lighted a cigar, and threw himself on a sofa before the fire.

The reveries of men who live much in the world are seldom very agreeable; the work of self-examination comes with a double penalty when it is rarely exercised, and the heavy arrears of time are formidable scores to confront. Lord Norwood was no exception to this theory. Not that he was one to waste time or temper in self-reproaches. The bygone was essentially with him the "irrevocable." It might, it is true, occasionally suggest a hint for the future, but it never originated a sorrow for the past. His philosophy was a very brief code, and comprised itself in this—"That he didn't think well of himself but thought worse of all others." All that he had seen of life was duplicity, falsehood, selfishness, and treachery. In different stations these characteristics took different forms; and what was artfully cloaked in courtesy by the lord, was displayed in all its naked deformity by the plebeian.

He might have conducted himself respectably enough had he been rich—at least he fervently believed so—but he was poor, and therefore driven to stratagems to maintain his position in society. Cheated by his guardians and neglected by his tutor, he was sent into the world half ruined and wholly ignorant, to become at first a

victim, and afterwards the victimiser. With no spirit of retributive vengeance—there was nothing of reprisal in his line of conduct—he simply thought that such was the natural and inevitable course of events, and that every man begins as dupe and ends as knave. The highest flight of the human mind, in his esteem, was successful hypocrisy; and although without the plastic wit or the actual knowledge of life which are required well to sustain a part, he had contrived to impose upon a very large number of persons who looked up to his rank; for, strange enough, many who would not have been duped by a commoner, fell easy victims to the arts of "my lord."

The value of his title he understood perfectly. He knew everything it could, and everything it could not, do for him. He was aware that the aristocracy of England would stand by one of their order through many vicissitudes, and that he who is born to a coronet has a charmed life, in circumstances where one less noble must perish ingloriously. He knew, too, how, for very shame's sake, they would screen one of themselves, and by a hundred devices seem to contradict before the world what they lament over behind its back; and, lastly, he knew well that he had always a title and a lineage to bestow, and that the peerage was the great prize among the daughters of men.

Now, latterly, he had been pushing prerogative somewhat too far: he had won large sums from young men not out of their teens; he had been associated in play transactions with names less than reputable; and, finally, having backed a stable to an immense amount at Newmarket, had levanted on the day of his losing. He had done the act deliberately and calmly. It was a *coup* which, if successful, replaced him in credit and affluence: if a failure, it only confirmed the wavering judgment of his set, and left him to shift for the future in a different sphere; for, while a disgraced viscount is very bad company for viscounts, he is often a very welcome guest amongst that amiably innocent class who think the privileges of the aristocracy include bad morals with blue ribands.

The Turf could now no longer be a career with him. *Ecarté* and *lansquenet* were almost as much out of the question. Billiards, as Sir Walter said of literature, "might be a walking-stick, but never a crutch." There was, then, nothing left for it but marriage. A rich heiress was his last *coup*, and as, in all likelihood, the thing could not be done twice, it required great circumspection.

In England this were easy enough. The manufacturing districts were grown ambitious. Cotton lords were desirous of a more recognized nobility, and millowners could be found ready to buy a coronet at the cost of half their fortune. But from England late events had banished him, and with a most damaged reputation.

Now, carrying nobility to the Continent was like bringing coals to Newcastle, the whole length and breadth of the land being covered with counts, barons, dukes, and princes; and although English nobility stands on a different footing, there was no distinguishing the "real article" amid this mass of counterfeit.

Every Frenchman of small fortune was an *émigré* count; every German, of none, was sure to be a baron; all Poles, unwashed, uncombed, and uncared for, were of the very cream of the aristocracy; and as for Italians! it was a nation of princes, with their uncles all cardinals. To be a viscount in such company was, perhaps, like Lord Castlereagh's unstarred coat, *plus distingué*, but certainly more modest. The milor, if not associated with boundless wealth, six carriages, two couriers, three cooks, and a groom of the chambers, the whole of the "Russie," or the "Black Eagle," means nothing abroad; if not bound up with all the extravagance and all the eccentricities of riches, if not dazzling by display or amazing by oddity, it is a contradiction of terms; and to be an English noble without waste, profusion, and absurdity, is to deny your country or be a counterfeit of your class.

Lord Norwood knew and felt all these things. They had often occupied his speculations and engaged his thoughts; so that, if his mind reverted to them now, it was to regard them as facts for future theory to build upon as mathematicians make use of the proofs of geometry without going over the steps which lead to conviction.

No; all his present reflections took a practical form, and might be summed up in the one resolve, "I must go no further. I have done everything that a man dare do—perhaps a little more—and yet keep his footing in the world." That tacit verdict of "not proven," which had been passed upon so many of his actions, might at any moment be reversed now, and a review of his life's career presented anything but a bright retrospect. Expulsion from a great school at thirteen; three years' private dissipation and secret wickedness in a clergyman's family; a dissolute regiment, from which he was given leave to sell out at Malta; two years with the Legion or Don Carlos, it mattered not which, in Spain; a year or so in London, with a weak attempt at reformation; a staff appointment in India obtained and sold; exposure partly hushed up; debts; Jews; renewals; the Fleet; the Bankruptcy Court; a few disreputable duels; an action for seduction; ending with the last affair at Newmarket, made up the grand outline, the details comprising various little episodes with which we must not trouble ourselves.

One incident, however, would come up prominently before his lordship's mind, and, however little given to let the past usurp the thoughts which should be given to the present, it still insisted upon sharing his attention. This was no less than a little love affair in Spain with a "ballerina" of the Opera, with whom, by the aid of a young priest then studying at Saragossa, he had contracted a mock marriage. The sudden movement of a corps of the army to which he was attached gave him an opportunity of an easy divorce from his bride, and it is likely he had not twice thought of her since the event had happened. Now, however, that an intention of marrying in reality occurred to him, the incident came freshly to his mind, and he jocularly wondered if his second marriage might prove more fortunate than his first.

The hour and the place were favourable to reverie. It was past midnight; all was silent and noiseless in the great palace; the sharp ticking of the clock on the mantlepiece was the only sound to be heard, save, at a long distance off, the dull, subdued flow of the Arno. The room itself, unlighted, except by the flickering wood fire, was in

deep shadow; and, lulled by these influences and his mild Manilla, Norwood was free to revel in so much of dream-land as natures like his ever explore.

Who can tell whether men of this stamp know what it is to "grieve"—whether chagrin for some momentary disappointment, anger at being thwarted, is not the nearest approach to sorrow that they ever feel? The whole course of their lives seems opposed to the notion of deep or intense feeling, and the restless activity of their ingenious minds appears to deny the possibility of regrets. As for Norwood, he would have laughed at the puerility of going over the bygone; therefore, if he did recur to a former incident of his life, it was involuntary and probably induced by the accidental similarity with those which now engaged his thoughts.

"If this Dalton girl be rich," thought he, "I might do worse. There are no relatives to make impertinent inquiries, or ask awkward questions. Hester can, and must, if I desire, assist me. Living out of England, the girl herself will have heard nothing of my doings, and in name, appearance, and air, she is presentable anywhere." He thought, too, that, as a married man, his character would be in a measure rehabilitated. It would be like entering on a new road in life; and if this could be done with a certain degree of style and outlay, he had great trust in the world's charity and forgiveness to pardon all the past. "A good house and a good cook," thought he, "are the best witnesses to call to character I have ever met. Turtle and champagne have proved sovereign remedies for slander in all ages; and the man who can sport Lafitte in the evening, and split a pencil at twenty paces of a morning, may defy envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness."

To find out about this girl's fortune was then his first object. As for family, his own rank was enough for both. The matter must be done quickly. The London season over, England would be pouring its myriads of talking, gossiping travellers over the Continent, and then he should be discussed—probably avoided and shunned too.

Even already certain unmistakable signs of coolness announced themselves amongst the men of his acquaint-

ance. George Onslow avoided play when in his company. Treviliani, one of Lady Hester's chief danglers, and the patron of the Turf in Tuscany, wouldn't even allude to a horse before him. Prince Midchekoff went further, and actually, save on rare occasions, omitted him from his dinner list. Now, although Norwood averred that he detested "*petit jeu*," hated spoony talk about racing, and dreaded the tiresome display of a "Tartar feast," these were all threatening indications, and he saw their meaning. He would willingly have fastened upon some one man —fixed a quarrel on him, and shot him. He had more than once in life adopted this policy with success; but here it would have been inapplicable, and the public opinion he sought to bring on his own side would have been only more inevitably arrayed against him.

"In what a mess does the want of money involve a man!" thought he, as he lay before the half-dying embers of the wood fire. "Had I won my bets on 'Chanticleer,' or had I but backed 'Amontillado,' how different had my position been to-day! That the simple change of one name for another in my betting-book—the mere hazard of a choice—of a horse, too—should influence a man's whole life, is a pretty fair instance of what the world is! Had I 'come right,' I should now be the favoured guest of some noble duke, shooting his grace's pheasants, drinking his Burgundy, and flirting with his daughters. Fortune willed it otherwise, and here I am, actually plotting a match with a nameless girl to rescue myself from utter ruin. Three weeks ago I would not have believed that this could happen; and who can tell what another three weeks may bring forth?—perhaps already there is mischief brewing. What if my lady's refusal to receive this evening may have some signification in it? Haggerstone is too courteous by half, and Jekyl has never called upon me since my arrival!" He laughed ironically as he said this, and added, "It is a bold game after all for *them* to play! Reprisals—to two of them at least—might prove awkward; and as for 'Master Albert,' he lives but on general sufferance! There has been a long run of luck against me—nothing but ill-fortune since the day I might have married Hester, and yet hung back, and that

very same year she marries another, and inherits an immense fortune in India. What a blow to each of us! Such has been my lot through life; always backing the loser till the very moment when luck changes, and his turn comes to win."

As these thoughts passed through his mind, weariness, the silence of the hour, the darkened room, induced slumber; and although once or twice he made a half-effort to arouse himself and go home, the listless feeling gained the mastery, and he dropped off to sleep. The uneasy consciences have oftentimes very easy slumbers. Norwood's was of the calmest; not a dream, not one flitting fancy disturbed it.

It was already nigh day as he lay thus, when the dull roll of wheels beneath the window in part awoke him; at least, it so far aroused him that he remembered where he was, and fancied that it might be George Onslow, on the return from his dinner-party. He lay for some minutes expecting to hear his step upon the stair, and see him enter the room; but as all seemed to resume its wonted quiet, he was dozing off again, when he heard the sound of a hand upon the lock of the door.

It is one of the strange instincts of half-slumber to be often more alive to the influence of subdued and stealthy sounds than to louder noises. The slightest whisperings, the low murmurings of a human voice, the creaking of a chair, the cautious drawing back of a curtain, will jar upon and arouse the faculties that have been insensible to the rushing flow of a cataract, or the dull booming of the sea.

Slight as were the sounds now heard, Norwood started as he listened to them, and, at once arousing himself, he fixed his eyes upon the door, in which the handle was seen to turn slowly and cautiously. The impression that it was a robber immediately occurred to him, and he determined to lie still and motionless, to watch what might happen. He was not wanting in personal courage, and had full confidence in his strength and activity.

The door at last opened; at first, a very little and slowly, then gradually more and more, till, by the mysterious half-light to which his eyes had grown accustomed,

Norwood could see the flounces of a female dress, and the small, neat foot of a woman beneath it. The faint, uncertain flame of the fire showed him thus much, but left the remainder of the figure in deep shadow.

Whether from excess of caution, or that she was yet hesitating what course to take, she remained for some seconds motionless; and Norwood, who had subdued his breathing to the utmost, lay in the deep shadow, speculating on the upshot of an adventure from which he promised himself at least an amusing story. The deep black lace which fell over the arched instep indicated a degree of rank in the wearer that gave a piquancy to the incident, and imparted a zest to the curiosity of a man who probably knew no higher pleasure in life than in possessing the secrets of his acquaintance.

He had time to run over in his mind a dozen little speculations of who she saw, ere she stirred; and at last, as if with change of purpose, he saw, or fancied that he saw, the door beginning slowly to close. Whether this was a mere trick of his excited imagination or not, a sudden gesture of impatience on his part threw down one of the cushions of the sofa. A slight shriek—so slight as to be barely heard—broke from the female, and she banged the door to. Norwood reached it with a spring; but although, as he wrenched it open, he could yet hear the rustling of a woman's dress in the passage, the sharp sound of a door hastily shut and locked defied all thought of pursuit, and he stood pondering over what had happened, and almost doubtful of its reality.

"At least the fair visitor belongs to the family; that much I may rely upon," said he, as he lighted a candle to explore the locality a little closer. The corridor, however, abruptly stopped at a small door, which was locked on the inside, but to what portion of the house it led he could not even conjecture. He was not a very unlikely man to trace the clue of such an adventure as this seemed to be. It was one of those incidents with which his course of life had made him somewhat conversant; and few were better able to fill up from conjecture every blank of such a history. Nor was he one to shrink from any suspicion, no matter how repugnant to every thought of honour,

nor how improbable to every mind less imbued with vice than his own.

For a moment or two, however, he almost doubted whether the whole might not have been a dream, so sudden, so brief, so trackless did it all appear. This doubt was, however, quickly resolved, as his eyes fell upon the floor, where a small fragment of a lace dress lay, as it was caught and torn off in the closing door. Norwood took it up, and sat down to examine it with attention.

"Point d'Alençon," said he, "bespeaks no vulgar wearer; and such is this! Who could have thought of George Onslow playing Lothario! But this comes of Italy. And now to find her out." He ran over to himself half a dozen names, in which were nearly as many nationalities, but some doubt accompanied each. "No matter," thought he, "the secret will keep."

He suddenly remembered at the instant that he had promised an acquaintance to pass some days with him in the Maremma, shooting; and, not sorry to have so good a reason for a few days' absence, he arose and set out towards his hotel, having first carefully placed within his pocket-book the little fragment of lace—a clue to a mystery he was resolved to explore hereafter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRANK'S JOURNEY.

Our readers may, ere this, have surmised that Frank Dalton's career as a soldier was neither very adventurous nor exciting, since otherwise we should scarcely have so nearly forgotten him. When he parted with Hanserl to pursue his journey, his heart was full of warring and conflicting emotions, love of home and hope of future distinction alternately swaying him; so that while his affections drew him ever backwards, his ambitions urged him to go on.

"I could have been so happy to have lived with them," thought he, "even as a peasant lives—a life of daily toil. I would have asked for no higher fortune than that peaceful home we had made for ourselves by our own affections—the happy fireside, that sufficed us for all the blandishments of wealth and riches. Still there would have been something ignoble in this humility—something that would ill become my blood as a Dalton. It was not thus my ancestors understood their station—it was not with such lowly ambitions *their* hearts were stirred. Count Stephen himself might at this hour have been in obscurity and poverty—as great, perhaps, as our own—had he been thus minded; and now he is a field-marshal, with a 'Maria Teresa' cross on his breast! and this without one friend to counsel or to aid him! What a noble service is that where merit can win its way self-sustained and independent—where, without the indignity of a patron, the path of honourable enterprise lies free and open to all! What generous promptings, what bold aspirations such a career engenders! He shall not be ashamed of me—he shall not have to blush for the Dalton blood," said the boy, enthusiastically; and he revelled in a dream of the old count's ecstasy on finding a nephew so worthy of their

name, and in his fancy he saw pictures of future scenes in which he figured. All of these had the same rose tint; for while in some he imagined himself winning the high rewards of great achievements, in others he was the caressed and flattered guest of rank and beauty. "To think that I should once have been thus!" cried he, laughing at the conceit, "trudging along the high road with a knapsack on my shoulder, like a Bursch in his 'Wander-jahre;'" and then he vowed to himself that "he would have a picture taken of his humble guise as first he started in life, to hang up at some future day beside the decorated soldier he was yet to be."

Selfishness can wear many a mask. Sometimes it can array itself in features almost noble—more often its traits are of the very meanest. Frank's egotism was of the former kind. He wanted to attain distinction by an honourable path—he would not have stooped to any other. He was ready to do or dare all for greatness. No peril could deter, no danger could daunt him; but yet was he totally deficient in that greatest element of success—that patient discipline of the mind which, made up of humility and confidence, can wait and bide its time, earning the prizes of life before it claim them. His pride of family, however, was his greatest blemish, since it suggested a false notion of distinction—a pretension so groundless, that, like a forged bank-note, it was sure to involve even the bearer in disgrace.

So full was he of himself and his own future, that he took but little note of the way as he went. Avoiding, from a sense of pride, to associate with the "Travelling Youths," as they are called, he walked along from early morning to late evening, alone and companionless. It was mostly a dreary and uninteresting road, either leading through dark and gloomy pine forests or over great plains of swampy surface, where the stubble of the tall maize, or the stunted vines, were the only traces of vegetation. As he drew near the Tyrol, however, the great mountains came in sight, while the continual ascent told that he was gradually reaching the land of glaciers and snow-peaks. Day by day he found the road less and less frequented: these lonely districts were little resorted to

by the wandering apprentices, so that frequently Frank did not meet a single traveller from day-dawn till night. Perhaps he felt little regret at this, leaving him, as it did, more time for those day-dreams in which he loved to revel. Now and then, some giant mountain, glittering in the sun; or some dark gorge, thousands of feet below him, would chase away his reverie, and leave him, for a time, in a half-bewildered and wondering astonishment; but his thoughts soon resumed their old track, and he would plod along, staff in hand, as before.

Walking from before daybreak to a late hour of the evening, Frank frequently accomplished in his day's journey as many miles as the traveller who, by post, only spent the few hours of mid-day on the road; in fact, he might have thus measured his speed, had he been less wrapped up in his own fancies, since, for several days, a calèche, drawn by three post-horses, had regularly passed him on the road, and always about the same hour.

Frank saw nothing of this; and when, on a bright and frosty day he began the ascent of the Arlberg, he little knew that the carriage, about half a mile in front, had been his travelling companion for the past week. Disdaining to follow the winding high-road, Frank ascended by those foot-tracks which gain upon the zig-zags, and thus soon was miles in advance of the calèche. At last he reached the half-way point of ascent, and was glad to rest himself for a few minutes on one of the benches which German thoughtfulness for the wayfarer never neglects to place in suitable spots. A low parapet of a couple of feet separated the road from a deep and almost perpendicular precipice, at the foot of which, above two thousand feet beneath, stood the village of Stuben. There was the little chapel in which he had his morning's mass—there the little Platz, where he had seen the post-horses getting ready for the travellers; there, too, the little fountain, covered with a shed of straw, and glistening with many an icicle in the bright sun. The very voices of the people reached him where he sat; and the sounds of a street-organ floated upwards through the still atmosphere. It was a scene of peaceful isolation such as would have pleased Nelly's fancy. It was like one of those "Dorfs"

she herself had often carved to amuse a winter's evening, and Frank's eyes filled up as he thought of her and of home.

The sound of feet upon the snow suddenly roused him, and, on looking round, Frank saw a traveller slowly coming up the pass. His dress at once proclaimed that he was not a pedestrian, save from choice, and was merely sauntering along in advance of his carriage. In the mere cursory glance Frank bestowed upon him he could see that he was a young and handsome man, with a certain soldierlike bearing in his air that well suited his bold but somewhat stern features.

"You journey well, young fellow," said he, addressing Frank familiarly. "This is the fifth day we have been fellow-travellers; and although I have post-horses, you have always kept up with me on your feet."

Frank touched his cap with a somewhat stiff courtesy at this unceremonious address; and, without deigning a reply, employed himself in arranging the straps of his knapsack.

"Are you a soldier?" asked the stranger.

"A cadet!" replied Frank as bluntly.

"In what regiment, may I ask?"

"The Franz Carl."

"Ah! my own old corps," said the other, gaily. "I served four years with them in the Banat. From what part of the Empire are you—you haven't the accent of an Austrian?"

"I am an Irishman."

"Oh! that explains it. And your name?"

"Dalton. And now, sir, what may be yours, for I don't see why this curiosity is to be one-sided," said Frank, with an air even more insolent than the words.

"I am Count Ernest of Walstein," said the other, without a touch of irritation.

"What rank do you hold in the service?" asked Frank, boldly.

"That of lieutenant-colonel, boy."

"And your age may be about thirty?" said Frank, half in question and half in scarcasm.

"I was twenty-eight last August," was the calm reply.

"By Jove! that *is* a service!" exclaimed Frank,

"where a man scarcely ten years my senior may command a regiment!"

The other laughed, and after a brief pause, said, "People are in the habit of calling me fortunate, so that you must not suppose my case to be the rule."

"Be it so: even as an exception, the example is a bright one. Another may do what you have done."

"If you mean that I have earned my rank by services, boy," said the count, smiling, "you would make a grave mistake. My promotion had another source."

Frank looked as though he were curious to hear the explanation, but the other gave none.

"How do you call yourself?" asked he of Frank, after a pause.

"Dalton," replied the boy, more respectfully than before.

"We have a field-marshal of that name in the service—a most gallant old soldier, too."

"My grand-uncle!" cried Frank, with enthusiasm.

"Indeed! So you are a grand-nephew to the Graf von Auersberg," said the count, taking a more deliberate view than he had yet bestowed upon him. "Then how comes it you are travelling in this fashion, and on foot?"

"I have not asked you why you journey in a calèche with three horses," said Frank, insolently.

"It's my habit to do so."

"This, then, may be *mine*, sir," said Frank, throwing his knapsack on his shoulder, and preparing to depart.

"Is not the Franz Carl at Vienna?" said the count, not seeming to notice the irritation of his manner.

"I believe so."

"Well, then, as I am going thither, perhaps you will accept of a seat in my calèche?"

There was a frankness in the way this offer was made that suddenly routed the ill-temper Frank had fallen into. No one was less disposed than himself to accept of a favour from a perfect stranger; but the tone and manner of the proffer had, somehow, disarmed it of all appearance of such; and as he stood uncertain what answer to make, the count added, "I'm always lucky. I was just

wishing for a travelling companion, and fortune has thrown us into acquaintanceship."

"I don't know—I can scarcely tell," said Frank, hesitating, "how or what to answer."

"You forget that we are comrades, Dalton—or shall be, at least, in another day or two," said the count, familiarly; "so step in, and no more about it."

The calèche had drawn up as he spoke, and the courier stood, cap in hand, beside the door, so that Frank had no time for any but an abrupt refusal, and *that* he could not give; he therefore bowed his head, and sprang in. The door was slammed sharply to, and the next moment the horses were rattling along over the snow, the merry bells of the harness jingling pleasantly as they went.

Probably no two beings could present a much stronger contrast than the two who now journeyed along side by side. The one, rich, highly placed, and distinguished with every gift of fortune at his command, and yet pleasure-sick, weary, and discontented; the other, poor, and almost friendless, full of hope, and ardent with all the buoyancy of youth. The count was as jaded and tired of life as the cadet was eager to enjoy it. Notwithstanding—perhaps we should rather say in virtue of—these strong contrarieties, they made admirable travelling companions, and the road slipped away unconsciously to each.

At Innspruck they halted for a day or two, and Frank accompanied his new friend to the cafés and theatres, mingling in the throng of those whose life is a round of easy dissipation. It is true that, to conform by dress and demeanour with these, Frank was obliged to spend the golden coins of Nelly's purse; louis after louis went in some one extravagance or another—sacrifices that cost him many a pang, but which, from pride, he bore up against with seeming indifference. Walstein presented him everywhere as the nephew of the old field-marshal von Auersberg; and as nothing was more common than to see a young cadet dispensing the most lavish sums, with equipages, liveries, and servants, none seemed surprised that the youth should indulge in these habits and tastes of extravagance. His very enjoyment seemed like

an earnest of being long habituated to these modes of life, for whether he played or drank, or in whatever excesses he mingled, there was ever the same joyous spirit; and Frank Dalton had all the outward signs of a youth rich in every accident of fortune. At first, thoughts of his humble home and of those by whose sacrifices he was enabled to indulge in such costly pleasures would cross his mind, and, what between shame and sorrow, he felt degraded and debased before himself; but, by degrees, the levity of action, induced as it ever will do, the levity of thinking; and he suffered himself to believe that "he was no worse than others." A more fatal philosophy than this, youth never adopted, and he who seeks a low standard rarely stops till he falls beneath even that. Frank's pride of family made him vain, and his vanity made him credulous; he therefore implicity believed all that his new companions told him, the familiar "thee and thou" of *camaraderie* giving an air of friendship to all the flatteries.

"Were I a nephew of a field-marshal like thee, I'd not serve in an infantry corps. I'd be in the Lichtenstein Hussars or the Lancers of the Kaiser," said one.

"So he will," cried another. "Dalton only joined the Franz Carl to get his promotion quickly. Once at Vienna, he will be an officer, and ready to exchange his regiment."

"Old Auersberg can make thee what he will, lad," said a third. "He might have been Minister of War himself, if he had liked it. The Emperor Franz loved him as a brother."

"And he is rich, too, no one knows how rich," broke in a fourth. "He commanded for many years on the Turkish frontier, in those good days when our Grenzers used to make forays upon the villages, and every Pashalic paid its black-mail for peace' sake."

"Thou are a lucky dog, Dalton, to find thy promotion and an inheritance thus secured to thee."

"When thou has a regiment, lad, don't forget us poor devils here, that have no uncles in the 'Maria Teresa' category."

"I'd lay my life on't, that he is a colonel before I become Rittmeister," said a young lieutenant of dragoons, "and I have had five years' hard service in Galicia and Servia."

"And why not?" broke in Count Walstein, who sat silently up to this smoking his meerschaum in a corner. "Has the empire lost its aristocratic character? Are not birth and blood to have their claims, as of old?"

This speech met a ready acceptance, for the company consisted of those who either were, or affected to be, of noble extraction.

"How our fathers deceive themselves in trying to deceive us!" said a young Hungarian cadet. "I, too, was sent off to join my regiment on foot. Just fancy—to walk from Arad to Presburg! I, that never went twenty miles in my life save on the saddle. They fitted me with my knapsack—just such a thing as Dalton's. I suppose about as many florins jingled in my purse as in his. They gave me their blessing and a map of the road, with each day's journey marked out upon it. And how far did I go afoot, thinkst thou?—Two miles and a half. There I took an 'Eil Bauer,' with four good horses and a wicker calèche, and we drove our sixty, sometimes seventy miles a day. Each night we put up at some good country house or other—Honyadi's—Ctzyscheny's—Palfi's; all lay on the road, and I found out about fifty cousins I never knew of before, and made a capital acquaintance, too, the Prince Paul of Ettlingen, who, owning a regiment of Light Dragoons, took me into his corps, and, when I joined them at Leutmeritz, I was already an officer. What stuff it is they preach about economy and thrift! Are we the sons of peasants or petty shopkeepers? It comes well, too, from them in their princely châteaux to tell us that we must live like common soldiers. So that, while yesterday, as it were, I sat at a table covered with silver, and drank my Tokay from a Venetian glass, to-morrow I must put up with sour Melniker, or, mayhap, Bavarian beer, with black bread, and a sausage to help it down! Our worthy progenitors knew better in their own young days, or we should not have so many debts and mortgages on our estates—eh, Walstein?"

"I suppose the world is pretty much alike, in every age," said the count, laughing. "It now and then takes a virtuous fit, and affects to be better than it used to be; but I shrewdly suspect that the only difference is in the hypocritical pretension. When I entered the service—and it is not so many years ago that I cannot recollect it—the cant was, to resemble that rough school of the days of old Frederick and Maria Teresa. Trenck's 'Pandours,' with their scarlet breeches stuffed into their wide boot-tops, were the mode; and to wear your moustache to your shoulders—to cry 'Bey'm Henker!' and 'Alle Blitzen!' every moment, were the veritable types of the soldier. Now we have changed all that. We have the Anglomania of English grooms and equipages, top-boots, curricles, hurdle-races, champagne suppers. Dalton will be the *ton* in his regiment, and any extravagance he likes to launch into certain to have its followers."

The youth blushed deeply; partly in conscious pride at the flattery, partly in the heartfelt shame at its inappropriateness to himself; and even the sincerity with which his comrades drank his health, could not drown the self-reproaches he was suffering under.

"Thou art an only son, too, Dalton!" said another. "What favours fortune will shower upon one happy fellow! Here I am, one of seven; and, although my father is a count of the empire, four of us have to take service in the infantry."

"What of that?" said a dark-complexioned fellow, whose high cheek-bones and sharp under-jaw bespoke a Pole. "I am a second lieutenant in the regiment that my grandfather raised and equipped at his own cost; and if I were to lose a thousand florins at *lansquenet* to-morrow, I'd be broke, like the meanest 'bursch' in the corps."

"It's better to be a rich Englander," cried one.

"And with a field-marshal for a grand-uncle!" chimed in another.

"And a 'Maria Teresa' to ask for thy grade as officer," said a third.

"It's a jolly service to all of us," said a young Bohemian, who, although but a cadet, was a prince, with a

princely fortune. "I ask for nothing but a war to make it the best life going."

"A war with whom?" cried several together.

"What care I with whom or where? With Prussia, if you will, to fight out our old scores about Franconia; with Russia, if you like better, for the Danubian provinces, and her Servian supremacy; with France—she's always ready, with a cause or without one; with Italy—to round off our frontier, and push our limits to the Apennines; I'd say, with England, only Dalton mightn't like it."

"And where would you pick your quarrel with England?" said Frank, laughing.

"Easily enough — through our ambassador at the Porte, or some outlying station, where Russia is her rival."

"Hang your politics," broke in a Hungarian. "Let us fight when the time comes, but not bother our heads about the cause. I'd rather take my chance of a sabre-cut any day than addle my brains with too much thought. Here's to you, Dalton—mayst soon be a Rittmeister of Hussars, lad; a prouder thing thou needst not ask for."

"Thou shalt give us a jolly supper at the 'Schwan,' Dalton, when we meet at Vienna," said another.

"And we'll pledge those fair sisters of thine—and they're both handsome, I'll be sworn—in the best Tokay Palfi's vineyard can yield."

"My regiment will be in garrison, in the Leopoldstadt, next month, and I'll remind thee of this pledge."

"And we shall be at Lintz," broke in another; "and thou mayst reckon on me, if I have to suffer an arrest for it afterwards."

"So it is agreed, Dalton, we are thy guests. For what day shall it be?"

"Ay, let us name the day," cried several together.

"When he is named an officer," said Walstein, "that will be time enough."

"Nay, nay—the day month after he arrives at Vienna," cried the Bohemian. "I have given three breakfasts and five suppers on the occasion of my promotion, and the promotion has never come yet."

"The day month after I arrive, then, be it," said Dalton. "We meet at—where is it?"

"The 'Schwan,' lad—the first *restaurant* of Europe. Let men talk as they will of the Cadran Bleu and the Trois Frères, I'd back Hetzinger's cook against the world; and as for wine, he has Steinkammer at thirty florins the flask! And we'll drink it, too—eh, Dalton? and we'll give a 'Hoch Lebe' to that old grandfather or grand-uncle of thine. We'll add ten years to his life."

"A poor service to Dalton!" said another; "but here comes Walstein's horses, and now for the last glass together before we part."

The parting seemed, indeed, to be "sweet sorrow," for each leave-taking led to one flask more, friendship itself appearing to make wondrous progress as the bottle went round. The third call of the postilion's bugle—a summons that even German loyalty could scarcely have courage to resist—at last cut short the festivities, and Frank once more found himself in the calèche, where at least a dozen hands contested for the last shake of his, and a shower of good wishes mingled with the sounds of the crashing wheels.

"Glorious fellows!" cried Dalton, in an ecstasy of delight; "such comrades are like brothers."

Walstein smiled at the boy's enthusiasm, and lighted his meerschaum in silence; and thus they journeyed, each too full of his own thoughts to care for converse. It was not at such a moment that Dalton could give way to dark or serious reflections; the blandishments and caresses of his new friends were too powerful to admit of any rivalry in his mind; and even when he did revert to thoughts of home, it was to picture to himself his father's pride at seeing him in the society of these high-born youths; of Kate's delight at the degree of notice he attracted; and even Nelly—poor Nelly!—he fancied yielding a gentle, half-reluctant assent to a companionship which, if costly and expensive, was sure to be honourable and high-minded.

"What would Hanserl say, too," thought he, "if he saw me seated at the table with those whose high-sounding names are the pride of Austrian chivalry—the Thuns, the Lichtensteins, the Schwartenschilds, and the Wal-

steins—families old as the Hapsburgs themselves? Little Hanserl, to whom these glorious families were the great lights of history—oh, if he could have set eyes on me this last evening! when, with arms around my neck, they called me comrade!" From this he wandered on to thoughts of his uncle, investing the old field-marshal with every noble and soldierlike attribute, and, above all, fancying him as overflowing with affection and kindness. What hosts of questions did he ask about his father and his sisters—how often had he to repeat their names and paint their resemblances, going over the most minute details of family history, and recounting the simplest incidents of their daily life, for "Uncle Stephen would know all."

In such pleasant fancies he fell fast asleep, even in his dreams to carry out those imaginings that, waking, had no control of reason.

Frank Dalton was awaked from a sound sleep and a pleasant dream of home by the hoarse voice of a mounted dragoon, ordering the postilion to halt; and, on looking out, he saw that they were drawn up close beside the angle of the great wooden bridge that crosses the Danube, under the walls of Vienna. The whole scene was one of wonderment and surprise to him. At his feet, as it were, rolled the stream of the rapid Danube; its impetuous flood splashing and foaming amid the fragments of ice floated down from the mountain regions, and which every moment were shivered against the stone breakwaters with the crash of thunder. Beyond the river rose the fortified walls of the city, covered with a dense multitude of people, eager spectators of a grand military display, which, with all the pomp of war, poured forth beneath the dark archway of the entrance-gate, and, winding over the "glacis," crossed the bridge and held on its course towards the Prater.

It was a clear, bright day of winter; the blue sky almost cloudless, and the sharp outline of every object stood out, crisp and well defined, in the thin atmosphere. Nothing could be more favourable for the effect of such a spectacle. The bright weapons glanced and glittered like silver—the gay trappings and brilliant uniforms showed in all their splendour—the scarlet Lancers, the blue-clad Hussars, the Cuirassiers, with their towering helmets, vied

with each other in soldierlike bearing; while the dense mass of infantry moved along with a surging, waving motion,—like a vast sea heaving with a ground-swell. It was an army complete in every detail—for, even to the "ambulances" for the wounded, everything was there!

"A review by the Emperor!" said Walstein; "and see, there comes his Staff." And he pointed to a group of horsemen, whose waving plumes and floating dolmans were seen at a little distance off in the plain.

"Oh, let us follow them!" cried Frank, enthusiastically. "Such a glorious sight as this I never even imagined."

"You'll see enough — perhaps too many such!" said the count, languidly. "It's a favourite pastime of our old general's to drag us out of quarters in the very depth of winter, and spend a day in the snow of the Prater."

"Who could have a thought for weather, or hardship, when engaged in such a scene?" said Frank.

"So, evidently, think those worthy field-marshals and generals of division, who, well mounted, and swathed in furs, canter down to the ground, an hour after we have reached it, and ride back again when they have 'taken the salute,' leaving us to plod wearily home, through wet roads and sloppy streets, to our cold barracks. But just the reverse is the opinion of those poor fellows yonder, with blue faces and frostbitten knuckles, and who have neither pride in this display, nor sympathy with the success of what is called 'a fine manœuvre.'"

Frank shook his head distrustfully. He wished not to credit the opinion, but knew not how to refute it, and was silent.

"That is the 'Franz Carl,' Dalton," said Walstein, pointing to a column of infantry, who, in their dark grey overcoats, seemed a sad-looking, gloomy mass. "They've got the best band and the most savage colonel in the service."

Frank gazed at the regiment with a strange sensation of awe and fear.

"There lies my destiny!" thought he. "Who knows what friendships or enmities await me yonder? What hearts in that dark mass will beat responsively with my own—what sources of sorrow or affliction may I meet with amongst them!"

"I wish thou hadst a better regiment, Dalton," said Walstein.

"How a better? Is it not a brave and distinguished corps?"

"Brave enough," said the other, laughing; "and as for distinction, an Archduke owns and commands it. But that is not what I mean. The regiment is a poor one; the officers are from Upper Austria, with little or no fortune—fellows who dine for a zwanziger, play dominoes for two kreutzers, waltz at the wine-gardens, and fight duels with sabres."

Frank laughed at the description; but his laugh had more of gloom than mirth about it, for he felt at every moment the false position he occupied and how inextricably complicated his circumstances were becoming. Every allusion to others showed him in what light he was himself regarded. "Was his deception honourable?—was it possible to continue it?" were the questions that would obtrude upon him, and for which no ingenuity could find answer.

"There's the corps for you, Dalton," said Walstein, drawing his attention to the "Hungarian Guard," all glittering with gold embroidery, and mounted upon the most beautiful white chargers—at once the most perfect riders and the best mounted cavalry in Europe. "In that regiment you are certain of being quartered either here or in Prague. Those laced jackets are too costly wear to send down to the Banat, or among the wilds of Wallachia. Besides, the Empress likes to see these gaudy fellows on their 'schimmels' beneath the Palace windows. Your uncle will, of course, grumble a little about the cost; perhaps your father, too, will look a little grave when he hears of six thousand florins for a 'dolman,' and four for a 'schabrach;' while ten or twelve horses—the very least you could keep—would scarcely sound like a moderate stable. Still, depend upon it, the corps is as good for service as it is costly, and Creptowitz, their Colonel, is a true hussar."

For a moment Dalton hesitated whether he should not make the honest avowal of his narrow fortune, and tell that he had no pretension to such habits of cost and

expense; but shame was too powerful to permit the acknowledgment. He had already gone too far to retract, and he felt that any candour now would be the confession of a cheat. If these were harassing and torturing reflections, one flickering ray of hope still glimmered through the gloom; and this was, what he might expect from his uncle. "If he be really rich, as they say," thought Frank—"if his favour be so great with the Emperor—even such a career as this may not be above my prospects." As he revolved these thoughts, he sat with his head buried between his hands, forgetful of where he was and all around him.

"You're losing everything, Dalton," said Walstein. "See, there go the 'Kaiser Jägers,' with their bugles, the finest in the service; and yonder are the Lichtenstein 'Light Horse,' mounted on thorough-bred cattle; and there, to the left, those savage-looking fellows with long beards, they are the 'Croat Grenadiers.' But here comes the Emperor!" And, as he spoke, one deafening cheer burst forth along the line, and was echoed back from the walls of Vienna; while every band struck up the national hymn of Austria, and the proud notes of "God preserve the Emperor!" floated through the air.

A brilliant staff of generals of every arm of the service accompanied "the Kaiser;" and Walstein ran quickly over the names of these, many of whom were among the first nobility of the Empire. Some were the war-worn veterans of the great campaigns; some the young hopes of Austrian chivalry; but, conspicuous above all, was a figure, whose stature, as well as the singularity of his uniform, attracted Frank's notice. He was a very tall old man, dressed in a uniform of purple velvet slashed with gold, and actually covered with the crosses and decorations of various orders. His cap was a tall chako of red-brown fur, from which a long, straight scarlet plume floated, and beneath which his grey hair was fastened in a queue, that hung half-way down his back. Yellow buskins ornamented with massive gold spurs, completed a costume which seemed almost a compromise between the present and some bygone age.

The figure of the wearer, too, suited well this impres-

sion. There was a stern rigidity of look as he sat still and motionless in his saddle, which relaxed into the polished urbanity of an old courtier as often as the Emperor addressed him. When bowing to the mane of his charger, he seemed the very type of courtesy; while, as he retired his horse, there was all the address and ease of a practised rider.

"There, to the left of Walmoden, on the powerful black horse, do you see that handsome old man in the purple tunic?" said Walstein.

"I have been watching him for several minutes back," replied Frank. "What a singular uniform!"

"Yes. It was the dress of the Artillery of the Imperial Guard in the days of Wagram and Lobau; and he is permitted to retain it, by a special leave of the Emperor —a favour he only avails himself of on occasions like the present."

"What a mass of orders he wears!"

"He has all that the Empire can bestow, from the 'Iron Cross' to the 'Maria Teresa.' He has the 'Legion of Honour,' too, sent him by Napoleon himself! It was that officer who at Elchingen rode up to the head of a French column, and told them that the waggons they were pursuing were the 'ammunition of the rear-guard!' 'If you advance,' said he, 'we'll fire them, and blow you and ourselves to atoms!' The coolness and heroism of the daring were well acknowledged by a brave enemy. The French halted, and our train proceeded on its way. Mayhap you have heard the anecdote before?"

"Never," said Frank, still gazing with admiration at the old soldier.

"Then I may as well tell you that he is the Count Dalton von Auersberg," said Walstein, lying back to enjoy the youth's amazement.

"What! Uncle Stephen?—Is that our uncle?" burst out Frank, in delight.

"I wish I could call him 'ours,' with all my heart," said Walstein, laughing. "Any man might well be proud of such a relative."

But Frank never heard or heeded the remark; his whole soul was wrapped up in the contemplation of the

old field-marshal, on whom he gazed as a devotee might have done upon his saint.

"He's like my father," muttered Frank, half aloud; "but haughtier-looking, and older. A true Dalton in every feature! How I long to speak to him—to tell him who I am."

"Not here, though—not here!" said Walstein, laying his hand on the youth's arm, for he almost feared lest he should give way to the sudden impulse. "Were you even the colonel of your regiment, you could not approach him now."

Frank stared with some surprise at a remark which seemed to treat so slightingly the ties of blood and kindred; while Walstein, by no means easy on the score of his companion's prudence, gave the word to the postilion to drive on; and they entered the city of Vienna.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE THREAT OF "A SLIGHT EMBARRASSMENT."

THE Mazzarini palace was now a proverb for all that was dissipated and extravagant throughout Florence, and in proportion as the society which frequented it was select and few in number, the more absurd were the rumours that went abroad of its dissipations and excesses. In default of a real, good, tangible scandal, the world invented a thousand shadowy little slanders, that, if not as deadly to reputation at once, were just as certain to kill character in the long run.

Sir Stafford's gout, of which he was confined to his bed or a sofa, was pronounced the lingering agonies of a broken heart. "My lady's" late dinners were orgies where every licentiousness held sway. George was a reckless gambler, who had already jeopardised all the wealth of his family; and, as for Kate, she was at the mercy of that amiable temperament of the human mind which always believes the worst, and as constantly draws the darkest inference from its belief.

Now, Sir Stafford was very gouty, very irritable, and very unhappy to boot, about a number of matters, which, however deeply interesting to himself, should have had no concern for the world. My lady did dine at eleven o'clock at night, and the company was assuredly not that from which a discriminating public would have selected archbishops, or even minor canons, consisting for the most part of that class of which we have already made mention in a former chapter, with now and then some passer-through of rank, or some stray diplomate on his way to or from his post. George Onslow was a large loser at play, but without having recourse to those stratagems for payment which were so generally ascribed to him. While

Kate—poor Kate—was neither better nor worse than the reader has hitherto known her.

We do not in this admission seek to conceal the fact that she was very different from what first we saw her. Society had taught her tact, grace, and elegance of deportment. Admiration had rendered her—yes, we say it advisedly—admiration had rendered her very attractive, drawing forth a thousand resources of fascination, and a thousand arts of pleasing, that often wither and die in the cold chill of neglect. The most fastidious critic could not have detected a fault in her manner; an ill-natured one might have objected to what seemed an excess of gracefulness; but even this was relieved by a youthful freshness and buoyancy of temperament, the last—the very last remnant of her former self.

She was the belle of Florence. Her sovereignty admitted of nothing like a rival. Whether she drove, or rode, or danced, or walked, the same admiring throng surrounded her; some, sincere in all their admiration; others, but following the lead which fashion took; and others, again, watchful observers of a manner in which they fancied they could trace the settled plan of a daring and ambitious character. Vanity had been the foible of her childish years; it was now the vice of her womanhood. Lady Hester ministered to this failing in a hundred ways. Liking Kate as well as it was possible for her to like anything, she took an intense pleasure in all the admiration she met with.

As an actor is said to "create the part" which is written for him, when he impresses the personation with traits peculiarly his own, so did she fancy that Kate was but a reflected image of all her own graces and fascinations; and probably the proudest days of her own triumphs never yielded more enjoyment than she now felt in the flattering praises bestowed upon Kate Dalton.

There were good-natured people who said that Lady Hester's admiration had another source, and that, as a somewhat *passée* beauty, she knew the full value of a younger and handsomer woman in attracting to her circle and society all that was distinguished by rank or station. We are not prepared to deny some force to this argument,

but assuredly it had less weight than other reasons. Lady Hester's own claims, besides, were higher than these detractors admitted. She was, although not very young, still very handsome, her rank and wealth both considerable, and her manner the perfection of that school to which she belonged. If her affection for Kate was only another form of selfishness, it was not the less strong on that account. She was the confidante of her sorrows—by no means a sinecure office; the chief counsellor in all her plans; she was the lay-figure on which she experimented a hundred devices in costume and toilet; and lastly—greatest charm of all—she was a dependent. Not, indeed, that Kate herself so understood her position: pride of family, the Dalton heritage, was too powerful in her to admit of this. Deeply, sincerely grateful she was for all Lady Hester's kindness; her affection she returned tenfold; but no sense of inferiority mingled with this feeling, save that which arose from her own devoted admiration of her friend.

The homage amid which she passed her life, the unceasing flow of flatteries around her, were not very likely to undeceive her on this point. A more respectful devotion could not have waited on a princess of the royal house. The great Midchekoff gave balls in her honour. The Arab horses of Treviliani were all placed at her disposal. The various visits to objects of curiosity or taste were arranged for her pleasure, and nothing omitted that could tend to stimulate her vanity and heighten her self-esteem.

The utmost we can say for her all this while is, that if she was carried away by the excitement of this adulation, yet, in her heart, she was as little corrupted as was well possible. She could not be other than enamoured of a life so unchanging in its happiness, nor could she disconnect the enjoyments around her from the possession of great wealth. She thought of what she had been a few months back: the "same Kate Dalton," braving the snows of a dark German winter, with threadbare cloak and peasant "sabots," an object of admiration to none except poor Hanserl, perhaps! And yet now, unchanged, unaltered, save in what gold can change, how different was her position. It had been well if her love of splendour

had stopped here. It went further, however, and inspired a perfect dread of humble fortune.

Over and over again did she hear disparaging remarks bestowed upon the striving efforts of "respectable poverty," its contrivances derided, its little straits held up to ridicule. In dress, equipage, or household, whatever it did was certain to be absurd; and yet all of these people, so laughed at and scorned, were in the enjoyment of means far above her own father's!

What a false position was this! How full of deceit must she become to sustain it! She invoked all her sophistry to assure herself that their condition was a mere passing state; that at some future—perhaps not even a remote one—they should have "their own again;" and that as in family and descent they were the equals of any, so they were not inferior in all the just claims to consideration and respect. She tried to think of her father and Nelly moving in the circles she now lived in; but, even alone, and in the secrecy of her own thoughts, her cheek became scarlet with shame, and she actually shuddered at the very notion. And even Frank, her once ideal of all that was graceful and noble-looking, how would he pass muster beside these essenced "fashionables" who now surrounded her! She endeavoured to console herself by thinking that her father would have despised the lounging, unmanly lives they led, that Ellen would have retired in bashful modesty from a society whose tone of freedom and licence would have shocked her, and that Frank would have found no companionship in a class whose pleasures lay only in dissipation; and yet all her casuistry could not reassure her. The fascinations amid which she lived were stronger than her reason.

She became first aware of the great change in herself on recognizing how differently a letter from home affected her to what it had done some months before. At first she would have hastened to her room, and locked the door, in an ecstasy of delight to be alone with dearest Nelly—to commune with her own sweet sister in secret—to hang on every line, every word, with delight, fancying herself once more with arms clasped around her, or bending down beside her cheek as she leaned over her work-

table. How every little detail would move her; how every allusion would bring up home before her—the snug little chamber of an evening, as the bright fire glowed on the hearth, and Nelly brought out her tools for modelling, while Hanserl was searching for some passage, a line, or a description that Nelly wanted; and then the little discussions that would ensue as to the shape of some weapon, or the fashion of some costume of a past age, so often broken in upon by her father, whose drolleries would set them laughing!

With what interest, too, she would follow each trifling occurrence of their daily life; the progress Nelly was making in her last group; its difficulties how would she ponder over, and wonder how to meet them! With what eager curiosity would she read the commonest details of the household, the dreary burden of a winter's tale! and how her heart bounded to hear of Frank—the soldier—although all the tidings were that he was with his regiment, but "spoke little of himself or the service."

Now, however, the glow of delight which a letter used to bring up was changed for a deep blush of anxiety and shame—anxiety, she knew not wherefore or how; of shame, because Nelly's writing on the address was quaint and old-fashioned; while the paper and the seal bespoke the very lowliest acquaintance with epistolary elegance. The letter she used to grasp at with a high-beating heart she now clutched with greater eagerness, but in terror lest others should see and mark its vulgar exterior!

How differently, too, did the contents affect her: so long as they referred to herself, in her own latest narrative of her life, she read with avidity and pleasure. Nelly's innocent wonderment was a very delightful sensation; her affectionate participation in her happiness was all grateful; even her gentle warnings against the seductions of such a career were not unpleasing; but the subject changed to home, and what an alteration came over her spirit! How dark and dismal became the picture—how poverty-stricken each incident and event—what littleness in every detail—how insignificant the occupations that interested them!

How great the surprise she felt at their interest in such

trifles! how astonished that their hopes and fears, their wishes or their dreads, could take so mean a form! This came with peculiar force before her, from a paragraph that closed Nelly's last letter, and which ran thus:—

"Think of our happiness, dearest Kate! We have just seen one who saw you lately—one of your Florence acquaintances; and I believe I might go further and say friends, for the terms in which he spoke of you evinced sincere and true regard. It was so kind of him to find us out, just to come and tell us about you; indeed, he remained a day here for no other purpose, since his diplomatic duties were urging him to England with speed."

When Kate had read thus far, she stopped; her face and neck crimson with shame, and her heart beating almost audibly. With lightning rapidity she ran over to herself three or four names of ministers and envoys who had lately left Florence, trembling to think it might be the gorgeous Russian, Naradskoi, the princely Neapolitan, Camporese, or the haughty Spaniard, Don Hernandez Orloes, who had visited their humble interior. What a humiliation for her, if she were ever to see them again! Home, at that instant, presented itself before her but as the witness of her shame: how sordid and miserable did its poverty appear, and with what vulgarity associated! Her poor old father, around whose neck but a moment before she would have hung with rapture, she shrank from with very terror: his dress, his look, his accent—every word he spoke, every allusion he made, were tortures to her; and Nelly—even Nelly—how she blushed to fancy her humble guise and poor exterior; the little dress of coloured wool, from the pockets of which her carving tools appeared; and then how the scene rose before her!—her father producing Nelly's last work, some little group in clay or wood. She pictured to herself his pride—her sister's bashfulness—the stranger's pretended admiration! Till now, these emotions had never seen a counterfeit. Oh! how she shuddered as her thoughts took more and more the colours of reality, and the room itself, and its poverty-struck furniture, rose before her! At last she read on:—

"His visit was of course a great honour, and, probably, had he come on any other errand but to speak of you, we

should have been half overwhelmed with the condescension; but in very truth, Kate, I quite forgot all his greatness and his grandeur, and lost sight of his ever holding any higher mission than to bring news of my dearest sister. Papa, of course, asked him to dinner. I believe he would have invited the Czar himself under like circumstances; but, fortunately for us, for him, and perhaps for you too, he was too deaf to hear the request, and politely answered that he would send my letter to you with pleasure, under his own diplomatic seal; and so we parted. I ought to add that Mr. Foglass intends speedily to return to Florence."

Three or four times did Kate read this name over before she could persuade herself that she had it aright. Foglass! she had never even heard of him. The name was remarkable enough to remember, as belonging to a person of diplomatic rank, and yet it was quite new to her. She turned to Lady Hester's invitation book, but no such name was there. What form her doubts might have taken there is no knowing, when Mr. Albert Jekyl was seen to cross the court-yard, and enter the house.

Knowing that if any could, he would be the person to resolve the difficulty, she hastened downstairs to meet him.

"Mr. Jekyl," cried she, hurriedly, "is there such a man as Mr. Foglass in this breathing world of ours?"

"Of course there is, Miss Dalton," said he smiling at her eagerness.

"A Minister or an envoy at some Court?"

"Not that I have ever heard," repeated he, with a more dubious smile.

"Well, a secretary of embassy, perhaps?—something of that kind? Who is he?—what is he?—where does he belong to?"

"You mean Bob, Miss Dalton," said he, at once puffing out his cheeks and running his hand through his hair, till it became a very good resemblance of the ex-Consul's wig, while, by a slight adjustment of his waistcoat, he imitated the pretentious presence of the mock royalty. "'You mean Bob, Madam,'" said he mimicking his measured intonation and pompous tone—"'Old Fogey, as Mathews always called me. Mathews and I and Townsend were

always together—dined at Greenwich every Sunday regularly. What nights they were! Flows of reason, and feasts of—eh?—yes, that's what they were.' "

"I must remind you that I never saw him," said she, laughing; "though I'm certain, if I should hereafter, it will not be very hard to recognize him. Now who is he?"

"He himself says, a grandson of George the Fourth. Less interested biographers call him a son of Foglass and Crattles, who, I believe, were not even coachmakers to royalty. He was a consul at Ezmeroum, or some such place. At least, they showed him the name on a map, and bade him find it out; but he found out something more, it seems—that there was neither pay nor perquisites, neither passports nor peculation; and he has brought back his wisdom once again to besiege the Foreign Office. But now do you happen to ask about him?"

"Some of my friends met him in Germany," said she, hesitatingly. She might have blushed, had Jekyl looked at her; but he knew better, and took pains to bestow his glances in another direction.

"It would be kind to tell them that the man is a most prying, inquisitive sort of creature, who, if he only had the sense of hearing, would be as mischievous as Purvis."

"I fancy they will see but little of him," said she, with a saucy toss of the head. "He made their acquaintance by affecting to know *me*. I'm sure I've no recollection of having ever seen *him*."

"Of course you never knew him, Miss Dalton!" replied he, with a subdued horror in his voice as he spoke.

"A letter for you, mademoiselle," said the servant to Kate; "and the man waits for an answer."

Kate broke the seal with some trepidation. She had no correspondents nearer than her home, and wondered what this might mean. It was in a strange commotion of spirit that she read the following lines:—

"Mrs. Montague Ricketts presents her respectful compliments to Miss Dalton, and begs to know at what hour to-day Mrs. M. R. may wait upon Miss D., to present a letter which has been committed to Mrs. R.'s hands for personal delivery. It may secure an earlier hour of

audience if Mrs. R. mentions that the precious document is from Miss D.'s father."

What could this possibly mean? It was but that very same day the post brought her a letter from Nelly. Why had not her father said what he wished to say, in that? What need of this roundabout, mysterious mode of communicating?

The sight of the servant still in waiting for the answer recalled her from these cross-questionings, and she hurried away to consult Lady Hester about the reply.

"It's very shocking, my dear child," said she, as she listened to the explanation. "The Ricketts, they tell me, is something too dreadful; and we have escaped her hitherto. You couldn't be ill, could you?"

"But the letter?" said Kate, half smiling, half provoked.

"Oh, to be sure—the letter! But Buccellini, you know, might take the letter, and leave it, with unbroken seal, near you; you could read it just as well. I'm sure I read everything Sir Stafford said in his without ever opening it. You saw that yourself, Kate, or, with your scepticism, I suppose, you'd not believe it, for you are very sceptical; it is your fault of faults, my dear. D'Esmonde almost shed tears about it, the other day. He told me that you actually refused to believe in the Madonna della Torre, although he showed you the phial with the tears in it!"

"I only said that I had not seen the Virgin shed them," said Kate.

"True, child! but you saw the tears; and you heard D'Esmonde remark, that when you saw the garden of a morning, all soaked with wet, the trees and flowers dripping, you never doubted that it had rained during the night, although you might not have been awake to hear or see it."

Kate was silent; not that she was unprepared with an answer, but dreaded to prolong a discussion so remote from the object of her visit.

"Now, Protestant that I am," said Lady Hester, with the triumphant tone of one who rose above all the slavery of prejudice—"Protestant that I am, I believe in the 'Torre.' The real distinction to make is, between what is above, and what is contrary to, reason, Kate. Do you understand me, child?"

"I'm sure Mrs. Ricketts's visit must be both," Kate said, adroitly bringing back the original theme.

"Very true; and I was forgetting the dear woman altogether. I suppose you must receive her, Kate; there's no help for it! Say three o'clock, and I'll sit in the small drawing-room, and, with the gallery and the library between us, I shall not hear her dreadful voice."

"Has she such?" asked Kate, innocently.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Lady Hester, pettishly; "but of course she has! Those dreadful people always have! Make the visit as brief as possible, Kate. Let it not be a pretext for anything after. Use your eyeglass on every occasion, so that you can be short-sighted enough never to know her again. I have seen you very supercilious at times, child—it is precisely the manner for this interview. It was really very wrong of your papa to write in this fashion; or your sister, or whoever it was. Nobody thinks of anything but the post, now-a-days. Pray tell them so; say it makes me quite nervous; you see I *am* nervous to-day! There, there! I don't want to fret you, child—but everything has gone wrong to-day. Midchekoff has given away his box, and I have promised mine to the Lucchesini; and that blonde flounce is much too narrow, so Célestine tells me; but I'm sure she has cut a piece off it to make a 'berthe' for herself. And then the flowers are positively odious. They are crimson, instead of cherry-colour, although I told Jekyl twice over they ought to be the very tint of Lady Melgund's nose! There, now; good-bye. Remember all I've been saying, and don't forget that this is a 'giorno infelice,' and everything one does will prove unlucky. I hope D'Esmonde will not come to-day. I'm really not equal to controversy this morning. I should like to see Buccellini, however, and have a globule of the Elysian essence. Bye-bye; do think better about the 'Madonna della Torre,' and get rid of that odious Ricketts affair as speedily as may be."

With these injunctions, Kate withdrew to indite her reply to Mrs. Ricketts, appointing three o'clock on that same afternoon for a visit, which she assuredly looked forward to with more of curiosity than pleasure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CONVIVIAL EVENING.

It is not necessary that the reader should participate in Kate Dalton's mystification regarding her father's letter, that document being simply a piece of Ricketts strategy, and obtained to secure an admission to the Mazzarini Palace, which, notwithstanding Lord Norwood's assurances, still remained an impregnable fortress to all her assaults.

Foglass was then commissioned to induce Mr. Dalton to write something—anything, to his daughter, to be transmitted under the Embassy seal—a magnificent mode of conveyance, which was reason enough to call into exercise those powers of penmanship which, since he had ceased to issue promissory notes, had lain in the very rustiest state of disuse. The command to obtain this credential reached Foglass just as he was about to start from Baden; but being desirous, for various little social reasons, to conciliate the Ricketts's esteem, he at once altered his arrangements, and feigning a sudden attack of gout—a right royal malady—he took himself to bed, and sent a few lines to Dalton, detailing his misfortune, and entreating a visit.

Never backward in the cause of good-nature, poor Dalton sallied forth at night, and notwithstanding the cutting blasts of a north wind, and the sharp driftings of the half-frozen snow, held on his way to the "Russie," where, in a very humble chamber for so distinguished a guest, lay Mr. Foglass in the mock agonies of gout.

"How devilish kind of you—how very considerate!" said Foglass, as he gave one finger of his hand to shake. "So like poor Townsend this—Lord Tom, we used to call him. Not wet, though, I hope?"

Punch and Palaver

"And if I was, it wouldn't be the first time. But how are you, yourself—where is the pain?"

"You must speak louder; there's a kind of damper on the voice in this room."

"Where's the pain?" screamed Dalton.

"There—there—no need to roar," whispered the other. "The pain is here—over the stomach, round the ribs, the back—everywhere."

"Ah, I know it well," said Dalton, with a wry contortion of the face. "It's the devil entirely when it gets under the short ribs! It begins like a rat nibbling you, as it might be, biting away little bits, with now and then a big slice that makes you sing out; and then the teeth begin to get hot, and he bites quicker, and tears you besides—sure I know it, this many a year."

To this description, of which Foglass heard nothing, he bowed blandly, and made a sign to Dalton to be seated near him.

"You'd like a little wine-and-water, I'm sure," said he, with the air of a man who rarely figured as a host, and liked it more rarely still.

"Spirits-and-water—boiling water—with sugar and a squeeze of lemon, is what I'll take; and see now, you'd not be worse of the same yourself. I've an elegant receipt for the gout, but whether it's sulphur or saltpetre's in it, I don't well remember; but I know you mix it with treacle, ash-bark, and earthworms, the yolk of four eggs, and a little rosemary. But as you mightn't like the taste of it at first, we'll just begin with a jug of punch."

The waiter had by this time made his appearance, and the order being communicated by a most expressive pantomime of drinking, and a few solitary words of German Dalton possessed, the room assumed a look of sociality, to which Dalton's presence very mainly contributed.

In the confidence such a moment of secrecy suggested, Foglass produced an ear-trumpet—a mark of the most unbounded good faith on his part, and which, had Dalton known him better, he would have construed into a proof of implicit reliance on his honour.

"I've been many years at Constantinople," said he, adjusting the instrument, "and the confounded muezzin

has made me a little deaf. It's an everlasting calling to prayers, day and night, there."

"How they ever expect to get to heaven by tormentin' and teasin', is more than I know," said Dalton.

"They're Mahomedans!" said Foglass, with the air of a man uttering a profound sentiment.

"Ay, to be sure," observed Dalton; "it's not like Christians. Now, is it true, they tell me they never eat salt meat!"

"Never!"

"Think of that! Not a bit of corned beef, nor as much as a leg of pork——"

"Wouldn't hear of it," interrupted Foglass. "Wine, too, is forbidden."

"And punch?"

"Of course, punch also. A pipe, a cup of coffee, the bath, and a little opium, are the luxuries of Turkish existence."

"To the devil I fling them all four," cried Dalton, impatiently. "How a man is to be social beside a coffee-pot, or up to his neck in hot water, beats me entirely. Faix! I don't envy the Turks!" And he sipped his glass as he spoke, like one who had fallen upon a happier destiny.

"If you'll mix me a very small glass of that punch, I'd like to propose a toast," said Foglass.

"There, now, that's spoke like a sensible man; pleasant company and social enjoyment are the greatest enemies to the gout. Make your mind easy, and keep your heart light, and the devil a fear but your knees will get limber, and the swellin' will leave your ankles; but weak punch and tiresome people would undhermine the best constitution in the world. Taste that."

To judge from Mr. Foglass's face, Dalton had at least provided one element of health for his companion.

"It is very strong—very strong, indeed!" said he, puckering up his eyes.

"It's the fault of the water hereabouts," said Dalton. "It doesn't mix right with the spirits; so that one-half —the first, generally—of your liquor tastes stiff, but the bottom is mild as milk."

The explanation gave such encouragement to Foglass, that he drank away freely, and it was only when he had finished that he remembered his intention of giving a toast.

"Now, Mr. Dalton," said he, as he sat up with a replenished glass in his hand, "I am going to redeem my pledge, and about to give you the health of the most beautiful girl in Italy—one whose attractions are the theme of every tongue, and whose ambitions may realize any height, or attain any eminence, that she pleases."

"Here's to you, Kate Dalton," broke in the father, "my own sweet child; and if you only come back to me as you went away, the sorrow better I ask, or grander."

"She will be a duchess; she may be a princess if she likes."

"Who knows—who knows?" said Dalton, as he hung down his head, and hammered away with his spoon at the sugar in his glass.

"Every one knows, every one sees it, Mr. Dalton," said Foglass, authoritatively. "From the Archduke Ernest of Austria to the very pages of the court, all are her worshippers and admirers. She'll come back to you with a proud name and a high coronet, Mr. Dalton."

"The devil a better than Dalton ever 'twill be! *that* I can tell you. 'Tisn't yesterday we took it, the same name; there's stones in the churchyard of Ballyhack can show who we are; and if she married the—the—God forgive me, I was going to say the Pope, but I meant the Grank Turk—she wouldn't be better than she is now, as Kate Dalton."

"Not better, certainly, but in a more exalted rank; in a position of more recognized distinction," said Foglass, blandly.

"No; nor that neither," cried Dalton, angrily. "The Daltons goes back to the ancient times of all. There's one of our name in the Bible. I'm not sure where, but I believe it's in the Book of Kings, or maybe the Psalms; but wherever it is, he was a real gentleman, living on his own estate, with his livery-servants, and his horses, and everything in good style about him; high on the grand jury—maybe the sheriff of the county."

Foglass, who had followed this description but imperfectly, could only bow in a deep acknowledgment of what he did not understand.

"The man that marries Kate Dalton isn't doing a piece of condescension, anyhow! that I can tell him. The dirty acres may slip away from us, but our good blood won't."

"No man has a higher veneration for blood, sir," said Foglass, proudly; "few men have better reason for the feeling."

"Is Fogles an old stock?" asked Dalton, eagerly.

"Foglass, like Fitzroy, sir, may mean more than loyalty would dare to avow. My father, Mr. Dalton—— But this is a very sad theme with me, let us change it; let us drink to a better feeling in our native land, when that abominable statute may be erased from our code—when that offspring of suspicion and distrust shall no longer be the offence and opprobrium of Englishmen. Here's to its speedy and everlasting repeal!"

The word was talismanic to Dalton, connected, as it was, in his mind with but one subject. He arose at once, and holding up his goblet in the air, cried out,—

"Hip! hip! hurrah! three cheers and success to it! Repeal for ever!"

Foglass echoed the sentiment with equal enthusiasm, and draining his glass to the bottom, exclaimed,—

"Thank you, Dalton! thank you; the heartiness of that cheer tells me we are friends; and although you know not what my feelings are—indeed none can—you can execrate with honest indignation those hateful unions!"

"Bad luck to it!" exclaimed Dalton, with energy. "We never had grace nor luck since we saw it!"

"Those petty German sovereigns, with their territories the size of Hyde Park!" said Foglass, with intense contempt.

"Just so. The Hessians!" chimed in Dalton, who had a faint consciousness that the other was alluding to the troops of the Electorate, once quartered in Ireland.

"Let us change the topic, Dalton," said Foglass, pathetically, as he wiped his brow like a man dispelling a

dark train of thought. "Here's to that charming young lady I saw last evening, a worthy sister of the beautiful Miss Dalton."

"A better child never breathed," said Dalton, drinking off his glass. "My own poor Nelly," muttered he, below his breath, "'tis better than handsome ye are—true-hearted, and fond of your old father."

"She has accomplishments, sir, that would realize a fortune; that is," said he, perceiving the dark cloud that passed over Dalton's features—"that is, if she were in a rank of life to need it."

"Yes—very true—just so," stammered out Dalton, not quite sure how to accept the speech. "'Tis a fine thing to be able to make money—not that it was ever the gift of the Daltons. We were real gentlemen to the backbone; and there wasn't one of the name for five generations—barring Stephen—that could earn sixpence if he was starving."

"But Stephen, what could he do?" inquired Foglass, curious to hear of this singular exception to the family rule.

"He took to soldiering in the Austrian army, and he's a field-marshal, and I don't know what more beside, this minute. My son Frank's there now."

"And likes it?"

"Troth, he doesn't say a great deal about that. His letter is mighty short, and tells very little more than where he's quartered, how hard-worked he is, and that he never gets a minute to himself, poor fellow!"

"Miss Kate, then, has drawn the prize in the lottery of life?" said Foglass, who was anxious to bring the subject back to her.

"Faix! that's as it may be," said the other, thoughtfully. "Her letters is full of high life and great people, grand dances and balls, and the rest of it; but sure, if she's to come back here again and live at home, won't it come mighty strange to her?"

"But in Ireland, when you return there, the society, I conclude, is very good?" asked Foglass, gradually drawing him on to revelations of his future intentions and plans.

"Who knows if I'll ever see it again? The estate has left us. 'Tis them Onslows has it now. It might be in worse hands, no doubt; but they've no more right to it than you have."

"No right to it—how do you mean?"

"I mean what I say—that if every one had their own, sorrow an acre of that property would be theirs. 'Tis a long story, but if you like to hear it, you're welcome. It's more pleasure than pain to me to tell it, though many a man in my situation wouldn't have the heart to go over it."

Foglass pronounced his willingness at once; and, a fresh jorum of punch being concocted, Dalton commenced that narrative of his marriage, widowhood, and loss of fortune, of which the reader already knows the chief particulars, and with whose details we need not twice inflict him.

The narrative was a very long one; nor was it rendered more succinct by the manner of the narrator, nor the frequent interruptions to which, for explanation's sake, Foglass subjected him. Shall we own, too, that the punch had some share in the intricacy, Dalton's memory and Foglass's perceptions growing gradually more and more nebulous as the evening wore on. Without at all wishing to impugn Dalton's good faith, it must be owned that, what between his occasional reflections, his doubts, guesses, surmises, and suspicions, his speculations as to the reason of this and the cause of that, it was very difficult for a man so deeply versed in punch as Foglass to carry away anything like a clear notion of the eventful occurrences related. The strength of the potation, the hour, the length of the story, the parenthetical interruptions—which, although only, by-paths often looked exactly like the high road—and probably, too, certain inaccuracies in the adjustment of the ear-trumpet, which grew to be very difficult at last—all contributed, more or less, to a mystification which finally resembled nothing so much as a very confused dream.

Had the worthy ex-consul then been put on his oath, he couldn't have said whether or not Sir Stafford had murdered the late Mr. Godfrey, or if that crime should

be attributed to Dalton's late wife. Between Sir Gilbert Stafford and Sir Stafford Onslow, he had a vague suspicion of some Siamese bond of union, but that they were cut asunder late in life, and were now drifting in different currents, he also surmised. But which of them "got the fortune," and which had not—who held the estate at present, and how Dalton came to be there at that moment relating the story—were Chinese puzzles to him.

Murder, matrimony, debts, difficulties, and Chancery suits danced an infernal reel through his brain; and, what with the scattered fragments of Irish life thrown in incidentally, of locking dinner-parties in, and barring the sheriff out, of being chased by bailiffs, or hunting *them*—all these *divertissements* ending in a residence abroad, with its manifold discomforts and incongruities—poor Foglass was in a state which, were it only to be permanent, would have presented a spectacle of very lamentable insanity.

The nearest approach to a fact that he could come to was, that Dalton ought to be enormously rich, and that now he hadn't a sixpence; that the wealthy banker was somehow the cause, Count Stephen being not altogether blameless; and that Kate was living a life of extravagance and waste, while her father and sister were waging a hard fight with the very "grimmest" of poverty.

"L'homme propose," &c., says the adage; and the poet tells us an instance, that "those who came to scoff remained to pray." So in the present case, Mr. Foglass, whose mission was to pump Peter Dalton out of every family secret and circumstance, had opened such an unexpected stream of intelligence upon himself that he was actually carried away in the flood.

"You've been badly used, Dalton," said he, at last. "I may say, infamously treated! Not only your fortune taken away, but your children torn from you!"

"Ay, just so." Dalton liked sympathy too well to cavil about his title to it. "True for you, a harder case than mine you'll not hear of in a summer's day. My elegant fine place, my beautiful domain, the seat of my ancestors—or, if they weren't, they were my wife's, and that's all the same—and to be sitting here, in a foreign country,

hundreds of miles away from home. Oh dear! oh dear! but that's a change!" For an instant the thought overwhelmed him, and he was silent; then, fixing his eyes on Foglass, he added, in a dreamy soliloquy, "Hundreds of miles away from home, drinking bad brandy, with a deaf chap in a red wig for company."

"I call yours a case of downright oppression, Dalton," resumed the other, who fortunately overheard nothing of the last remark. "If you had been residing in Persia or the Caucasus—even in the Danubian Provinces—we'd have made you a case for the Foreign Office. You'd have had your compensation, sir. Ay, faith! you'd have had a good round sum for the murder of your father—old what's his name? You'd have had your claim, sir, for the loss of that fine boy the Austrians have taken from you, Mrs. Dalton's wardrobe, and all that sort of thing. I must repeat my conviction, you've been grossly—infamously treated!"

"And just to think of my own flesh and blood—Stephen, my uncle!"

"I can't think of him, sir! I can't bear to think of him!" cried Foglass, with enthusiasm.

"A count of the Empire!" resumed Dalton; "a field-marshal, and a something else, with his Maria Teresa!"

"At his age he might give up those habits," said Foglass, who had converted the Cross of the Empress into a very different relationship.

"And now, there's Kate," said Dalton, who never heard his comment—"there's Kate, my own favourite of them all! thinks no more about us than if we didn't belong to her!"

"Living in splendour!" mumbled Foglass. "Boundless extravagance!"

"Just so! Wasting hundreds—flinging the money about like chaff!"

"I saw a ball dress of hers myself, at Madame Fanchone's, that was to cost three thousand francs!"

"Three thousand francs! How am I to bear it all?" exclaimed Dalton, fiercely. "Will any man tell me how an Irish gentleman, with an embarrassed estate, and in the present times, can meet such extravagance as that?

Three thousand francs! and, maybe, for a flimsy rag, that wouldn't stand a shower of rain! Oh, Fogles! you don't know the man that's sitting before you—hale and stout and hearty as he looks—the trials he has gone through, and the troubles he has faced—just for his children. Denying himself every enjoyment in life!"—(here he sipped his glass)—"giving up every little comfort he was used to!"—(another sip)—"all for his family! Look at my coat! feel the wool of it; see my breeches, 'tis like the hide of a bear they are; take notice of my shoes; and there's my purse, with two florins and eight kreutzers in it; and, may I never see glory, if I don't owe a little bill in every shop that will trust me! And for what? Answer me that. For what?"

Although the savage energy with which this question was put would have extorted an answer from the least willing witness, Foglass was unable to reply, and only stared in mute astonishment.

"I'll tell you for what, Fogles," resumed Dalton, with a stroke of his clenched fist on the table—"I'll tell you for what! To have a son in the Hussars, and a daughter in all the height of fashion and fine life! That's it, Fogles. My boy keeping company with all the first people in Austria, hand and glove with—what's his name?—something like 'Misty,' or 'Hazy'—I forget it now—dining, driving, and shooting with them. And my girl, Kate—— But sure you know better than myself what style she's keeping! That's the reason I'm what you see me here! —pining away in solitude and small means! All for my children's sake!"

"It is highly meritorious. It does you honour, Dalton," said the other, emphatically.

"Well, I hope it does," said he, with a sigh. "But how few know it, after all!"

"And has this same Sir Stafford never taken any steps towards recompensing you? Has there been nothing like an *amende* for the great losses you've sustained?"

"Oh, indeed, to do him justice, he made me a kind of an offer once; but you see it was hampered with so many conditions and restrictions, and the like, that I rejected

it with contempt. 'No!' says I, ''tisn't poverty will ever make me demean the old family! The Daltons won't suffer disgrace from me!'"

"He could have assisted you without such an alternative, Dalton."

"Maybe he could, indeed!" sighed the other.

"I know it well; the man is one of the richest in England—the head of a great bank besides, making thousands every week."

"I often thought of that," said Dalton. "Sure it would cost him little just to discount a small thing for me at three months. I'd take care to meet it, of course; and he'd never lose a sixpence by me. Indeed, he'd be gaining; for he'd have the commission, and the discount, and the interest, and the devil knows what besides of law expenses——"

Here he stopped abruptly, for he had unwittingly strayed into another and very different hypothesis regarding the fate of his bill. However, he pulled up short, tossed off his punch, and said, "I only wish he'd do it!"

"Why not try him, then?—you ought, at least, to give yourself the chance."

"And, if he refused me, I'd have to call him out," said Dalton, gravely; "and just see all the confusion that would lead to. My daughter on a visit there, myself here, and, maybe, obliged to go hundreds of miles to meet him, and no end to the expense, taking a friend with me, too. No, no! that would be too selfish entirely."

"What if you were to throw out a hint, when you write to your daughter? Allude to present pressure for money—speak of tenants in arrear—remittances not arrived?"

"Oh, faith! there's no need prompting me about these things," said Dalton, with a bitter laugh. "I know them too well already."

"Write a few lines, then; you'll find paper and pens on that table. I've told you that I will send it under my own seal, with the despatches."

Dalton was very little given to letter-writing at any period, but to encounter the labour at night by candle-

light, and after a few hours' carouse, seemed to him quite out of the question. Still, the Embassy seal, whatever that might be, was no common temptation. Perhaps he fancied it to be like one of those portentous appendages which are seen attached to royal grants! Who can tell what amount of wax and ribbon his imagination bestowed upon it! Besides this, there was another motive—never again, perhaps, should he be able to write without Nelly's knowledge. This consideration decided the question at once. Accordingly he put on his spectacles, and seated himself gravely to the work, which proceeded thus:—

"DEAR KATE,—I'm spending the evening with your friend the Ambassador of—I forget where—Fogles is his name—and as pleasant a man as I ever met; and he sends his regards to you and all the family, and transmits this under his own seal. Things is going on bad enough here. Not a shilling out of Crognoborraghan. Healey ran away with the November rent and the crops, and Sweeney's got into the place, and won't give it up to any one without he gets forty pound! I'd give him forty of my teeth as soon, if I had them! Ryan shot Mr. Johnson coming home from work, and will be hanged on Saturday; and that's in our favour, as he was a life in Honan's lease. There's no money in Ireland, Kellet tells me, and there's none here. Where the blazes is it all gone to? Maybe, like the potatoes, 'tis dying out!

"Frank's well sick of soldiering; they chained him up like a dog, with his hand to his leg, the other night for going to the play; and if he wasn't a born gentleman, he says, they'd have given him 'four-and-twenty,' as he calls it, with a stick for impudence. Stephen's no more good to him than an old umbrella—never gave him bit nor sup! Bad luck to the old Neygur—I can't speak of him.

"Nelly goes on carving and cutting away as before. There's not a saint in the calendar she didn't make out of rotten wood this winter, and little Hans buys them all, at a fair price, she says; but I call a Holy Family cheap at ten florins, and 'tis giving the Virgin away to sell her for a Prussian dollar. 'Tis a nice way for one of the Daltons to be living—by her own industry!

"I often wish for you back here; but I'd be sorry, after all, ye'd come, for the place is poorer than ever, and you're in good quarters, and snug where you are.

"Tell me how they treat you—if they're as kind as before—and how is the old man, and is the gout bad with him still? I send you in this a little bill Martin Cox, of Drumsnagh, enclosed me for sixty-two ten-and-eight. Could you get the old baronet to put his name on it for me? Tell him 'tis as good as the bank paper, that Cox is as respectable a man as any in Leitrim, and an estated gentleman, like myself, and of course that we'll take care to have the cash ready for it when due. This will be a great convenience to me, and Fogles says it will be a pleasure to Sir Stafford, besides extending his connection among Irish gentlemen. If he seems to like the notion, say that your father is well known in Ireland, and can help him to a very lively business in the same way. Indeed, I'd have been a fortune to him myself alone, if he'd had the discounting of me for the last fifteen years!

"Never mind this, however, for bragging is not genteel; but get me his name, and send me the 'bit of stiff' by return of post.

"If he wants to be civil, maybe he'll put it into the bank himself, and send me the money; and if so, let the order be on Haller and Oelcher, for I've a long account with Koch and Elz, and maybe they'd keep a grip of the cash, and I'd just be where I was before.

"If I can get out of this next spring it would be a great economy, for I owe something to everybody, and a new place always gives courage.

"I'm hesitating whether I'll go to Genoa or New York, but cheapness will decide me, for I only live now for my family.

"With all my affection,

"Believe me your fond father,

"PETER DALTON.

"P.S.—If Sir S. would rather have my own acceptance, let him draw for a hundred, at three months, and I'm ready; but don't disappoint me, one way or other.

Wood is fifteen florins a 'klafter' here, now, and I've nobody to cut it when it comes home, as Andy took a slice out of his shin on Friday last with the hatchet, and is in bed ever since. Vegetables, too, is dear; and since Frank went, we never see a bit of game.

"2nd P.S.—If you had such a thing as a warm winter cloak that you didn't want, you might send it to Nelly. She goes out in a thing like a bit of brown paper, and the wooden shoes is mighty unhandy with her lameness.

"Mind the bill."

"You are writing a rather lengthy despatch, Dalton," said Foglass, who had twice dozed off to sleep, and woke again, only to see him still occupied with his epistle.

"It's done now," said Dalton, with a sigh; for, without well knowing why, he was not quite satisfied with the performance.

"I wish you'd just add a line, to say that Mrs. Ricketts —Mrs. Major-General Ricketts—who resides at Florence, is so desirous to know her. You can mention that she is one of the first people, but so exclusive about acquaintance, that it is almost impossible to get presented to her, but that this coming winter the Embassy will, in all likelihood, open a door to so desirable an object."

"Lady Hester will know her, of course?" said Dalton, whose sense of proprieties was usually clear enough when selfishness did not interfere, "and I don't see that my daughter should extend her acquaintance through any other channel."

"Oh, very true; it's of no consequence. I only meant it as an attention to Miss Dalton; but your observation is very just," said Foglass, who suddenly felt that he was on dangerous ground.

"Depend upon't, Fogles, my daughter is in the best society of the place, whatever it is. It's not a Dalton would be left out."

Foglass repeated his most implicit conviction in this belief, and did all in his power to efface the memory of the suggestion, but without success. Family pride was a kind of birdlime with old Dalton, and if he but touched, he could not leave it. The consequences, however, went

no further than a long and intricate dissertation on the Dalton blood for several centuries back, through which Foglass slept just as soundly as the respected individuals there recorded, and was only awoke at last by Dalton rising to take leave—an event at last suggested by the empty decanter.

"And now, Fogles," said he, summing up, "you'll not wonder, that if we're poor we're proud. I suppose you never heard of a better stock than that since you were born?"

"Never, by Jove! Guelphs, Ghibellines, and Hapsburgs are nothing to them. Good night, good night! I'll take care of your letter. It shall go to-morrow in the Embassy bag."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN INVASION.

To afford the reader the explanation contained in the preceding chapter, we have been obliged to leave Kate Dalton waiting, in mingled anxiety and suspense, for the hour of Mrs. Ricketts's visit. Although her mind principally dwelt upon the letter which had been announced as coming from her father—an event so strange as naturally to cause astonishment—she also occasionally recurred to the awkwardness of receiving persons whom Lady Hester had so scrupulously avoided, and being involved in an acquaintanceship so unequivocally pronounced vulgar. A few short months before, and the incident would have worn a very different aspect to her eyes. She would have dwelt alone on the kindness of one, an utter stranger, addressing her in terms of respectful civility,

and proffering the attention of a visit. She would have been grateful for the good-nature that took charge of a communication for her. She would have viewed the whole as a sort of flattering notice, and never dreamed of that long catalogue of "inconveniences" and annoyances so prolifically associated with the event as it at present stood. She was greatly changed in many respects. She had been daily accustomed to hear the most outrageous moral derelictions lightly treated, or, at least, but slightly censured. For every fault and failing there was a skilful excuse or a charitable explanation. The errors of the fashionable world were shown to be few, insignificant, and venial; and the code showed no exception to the rule that "well-bred people can do no wrong;" vulgarity alone was criminal; and the sins of the underbred admitted of no palliation. Her sense of justice might have revolted against such judgments, had reason been ever appealed to; but such was not the case. Ridicule alone was the arbiter; whatever could be scoffed at was detestable; and a solecism in dress, accent, or demeanour was a higher crime than many a grave transgression or glaring iniquity.

The little mimicries of Albert Jekyl, as he described Mrs. Ricketts—the few depreciatory remarks of Lady Hester concerning her—would have outweighed her worth had her character been a cornucopia of goodness. It was, then, in no pleasant flurry of spirits that, just as the clock struck three, Kate heard the heavy door of the Palace flung wide, and the sound of wheels echo beneath the vaulted entrance. The next moment a small one-horse phaeton, driven by a very meagre servant in a tawdry livery, passed into the courtyard, having deposited its company in the hall.

There had been a time, and that not so very far back either, when the sight of that humble equipage, with visitors, would have made her heart beat to the full as strong, albeit with very different emotions. Now, however, she actually glanced at the windows to see if it had attracted notice, with a kind of terror at the ridicule it would excite. Never did she think an old grey horse could be so ugly—never did wheels make so intolerable a noise before! Why would people dress up their servants

like harlequins?—what was the meaning of that leopard-skin rug for the feet? It was an odious little vehicle altogether. There was a tawdry, smirking, self-satisfied pretension about its poverty that made one wish for a break-down on looking at it!

"Mrs. Montague Ricketts and Miss Ricketts," said a very demure-looking groom of the chambers! and although his features were immaculate in their expressions of respect, Kate felt offended at what she thought was a flippancy in the man's manner.

Although the announcement was thus made, the high and mighty personages were still three rooms off, and visible only in the dim distance, coming slowly forward.

Leaning on her sister's arm, and with a step at once graceful and commanding, Mrs. Ricketts came on. At least, so Kate judged an enormous pyramid of crimson velvet and ermine to be, from the summit of which waved a sufficiency of plumes for a moderate hearse. The size and dignity of this imposing figure almost entirely eclipsed poor Martha, and completely shut out the slender proportions of Mr. Scroope Purvis, who, from being loaded like a sumpter-mule with various articles for the road, was passed over by the groom of the chambers, and believed to be a servant. Slow as was the order of march, Purvis made it still slower by momentarily dropping some of the articles with which he was charged; and as they comprised a footstool, a poodle, two parasols, an album, a smelling-bottle, a lorgnette, with various cushions, shawls, and a portable fire-screen, his difficulties may be rather compassionated than censured.

"Scroope, how can you? Martha, do speak to him. It's down again! He'll smash my lorgnette—he'll smother Fidèle. How very awkward—how absurd we shall look!" Such were the *sotto voce* accompaniments that filled up the intervals till they arrived at the great drawing-room, where Kate Dalton sat.

If the reader has ever watched a great tragedy queen emerging from the flats, when, after a lively dialogue with the prompter, and the utterance of a pleasant jest, she issues forth upon the open stage, to vent the sorrows or the wrongs of injured womanhood, he may form some

faint idea of the rapid transformation that Mrs. Ricketts underwent as she passed the door-sill. Her first movement was a sudden bound forwards, or, at least, such an approach to a spring as a body so imposing could accomplish, and then, throwing her arms wide, she seemed as if about to enclose Miss Dalton in a fast embrace; and so, doubtless, had she done, if Kate had responded to the sign. A deep and very formal curtsey was, however, her only acknowledgment of this spontaneous burst of feeling, and Mrs. Ricketts, like a skilful general, at once changing her plan of attack, converted her ardour into astonishment, and exclaimed,—

"Did you ever see such a resemblance? Could you believe it possible, Martha? A thousand apologies, my dear Miss Dalton, for this rudeness; but you are so wonderfully like our dear, dear friend Lady Caroline Montressor, that I actually forgot myself. Pray forgive me, and let me present my sister, Miss Ricketts. My brother, Mr. Scroope Purvis, Miss Dalton."

The ceremonial of introduction over, and Mrs. Ricketts being at last seated—a very tedious operation, in which the arrangement of cushions, pillows, and footstools played a conspicuous part—that bland lady began, in her very softest of voices,—

"This, indeed, repays me—amply, fully repays me!—eh, Martha?"

"Quite so, sister," responded Martha, in a meek whisper.

"A poor invalid as I am, rarely rising from a sofa except to snatch the perfumed odours of a violet in spring, or to listen to the murmurs of a rippling fountain; denied all the excitements of society by a nervous temperament so finely strung as to be jarred by contact, even the remotest, with inferior souls—think of what ecstasy a moment like this affords me!"

As Kate was profoundly ignorant to what happy combination of circumstances this blissful state could be attributed, she could only smile courteously, and mutter some vague expressions of her pleasure, satisfaction, and so forth.

"Eve in her own paradise!" exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts,

as she turned her eyes from Kate to the gorgeous chamber in which they were seated. "May I ask if the taste of these decorations be yours, Miss Dalton?"

"Lady Hester Onslow's, madam," said Kate, quietly.

"I declare, I like these hangings better than 'Gobelins' —they are lighter, and more graceful. You remember, Martha, I told the dear Queen of Saxony that blue velvet would go so well with her small pictures. We discussed the point every morning at breakfast for a week, and the poor dear King at last called us the 'blue devils;'—very happy, wasn't it, Miss Dalton? But he speaks English just like one of ourselves."

"These are all Dutch pictures, I perceive," said Purvis, who, with his poodle under his arm, was making a tour of the room, peering into everything, opening books, prying into china jars, and spying into work-boxes, as though in search of some missing article.

"I'm tired of Wou-Wou-Wou——" Here the poodle barked, doubtless in the belief that he was responding to an invitation. "Down, Fidèle! Wou-vermans," gulped out Purvis. "He's always the same."

"But those dear white palfreys, how I love them! I always have a white horse, out of regard for Wouvermans."

Kate thought of the poor grey in the courtyard, and said nothing.

"And there is something so touching—so exquisitely touching—in those Flemish interiors, where the goodwife is seated reading, and a straggling sunbeam comes slanting in upon the tiled floor. Little peeps of life, as it were, in a class of which we know nothing; for really, Miss Dalton, in our order, sympathies are too much fettered; and I often think it would be better that we knew more of the middle classes! When I say this, of course I do not mean as associates—far less as intimates —but as ingredients in the grand scheme of universal nature."

"'The no-no-noblest, study of man-mankind is'—what is it, sister?"

"'Man,' Scroope; but the poet intended to refer to the great aims and objects of our being. Don't you think

so, Miss Dalton? It was not man in the little cares of every-day life, in his social relations, but man in his destinies, in his vast future, when he goes beyond 'that bourne——'"

"From which nobody ever got out again," cackled Purvis, in an ecstasy at the readiness of his quotation.

"'From which no traveller returns,' Scroope, is, I believe, the more correct version."

"Then it don't mean pur-pur-pur-purgatory," gulped Scroope, who, as soon as the word was uttered, became shocked at what he said. "I forgot you were a Ro-Ro-Roman, Miss Dalton," said he, blushing.

"You are in error, Scroope," said Mrs. Ricketts. "Miss Dalton is one of ourselves. All the distinguished Irish are of the Reformed faith."

"I am a Catholic, madam," said Kate, not knowing whether to be more amused than annoyed at the turn the conversation had taken.

"I knew it," cried Purvis, in delight. "I tracked your carriage to the D-D-Duomo, and I went in after you, and saw you at the co-co-co-co'——

"Corner," whispered Martha, who, from his agonies, grew afraid of a fit.

"No, not the corner, but the co-co-co-confessional—confessional, where you stayed for an hour and forty minutes by my own watch; and I couldn't help thinking that your pec-pec-pec-peccadilloes were a good long score, by the time it took to—to—to tell them."

"Thanks, sir," said Kate, bowing, and with difficulty restraining her laughter; "thanks for the very kind interest you seem to have taken in my spiritual welfare."

"Would that I might be suffered a participation in that charge, Miss Dalton," cried Mrs. Ricketts, with enthusiasm, "and allowed to hold some converse with you on doctrinal questions!"

"Try her with the posers, sister," whispered Purvis.

"Hush! Scroope. Mere opportunities of friendly discussion, nothing more I ask for, Miss Dalton."

"Give her the posers," whispered Purvis, louder.

"Be quiet! Scroope. I have been fortunate enough to resolve the doubts of more than one ere this. That dear

angel, the Princess Ethelinda of Cobourgh, I believe I may say, owes her present enlightenment to our sweet evenings together."

"Begin with the posers."

"Hush! I say, Scroope."

"May I ask," said Kate, "what is the suggestion Mr. Purvis has been good enough to repeat?"

"That I should give you this little tract, Miss Dalton," said Mrs. Ricketts as she drew out a miscellaneous assemblage of articles from a deep pocket, and selected from the mass a small blue-covered pamphlet, bearing the title, "Three Posers for Papists, by M. R."

"Montague Ricketts," said Purvis, proudly; "she wrote it herself, and the Pope won't let us into Rome in consequence. It's very droll, too; and the part about the—the—Vir-gin——"

"You will, I'm sure, excuse me, madam," said Kate, "if I beg that this subject be suffered to drop. My thanks for the interest this gentleman and yourself have vouchsafed me will only be more lasting by leaving the impression of them unassociated with anything unpleasing. You were good enough to say that you had a letter for me?"

"A letter from your father—that dear, fond father, who dotes so distractingly upon you, and who really seems to live but to enjoy your triumphs. Martha, where is the letter?"

"I gave it to Scroope, sister."

"No, you didn't. I never saw——"

"Yes, Scroope, I gave it to you, at the drawing-room fire——"

"Yes, to be sure, and I put it into the ca-ca-ca——"

"Not the candle, I hope," cried Kate, in terror.

"No, into the card-rack; and there it is now."

"How provoking!" cried Miss Ricketts; "but you shall have it to-morrow, Miss Dalton. "I'll leave it here myself."

"Shall I appear impatient, madam, if I send for it this evening?"

"Of course not, my dear Miss Dalton; but shall I commit the precious charge to a menial's hand?"

"You may do so with safety, madam," said Kate, not without a slight irritation of manner as she spoke.

"Mr. Foglass, the late minister and envoy at ——"

Here a tremendous crash, followed by a terrific yelping noise, broke in upon the colloquy; for it was Fidèle had thrown down a Sèvres jar, and lay, half-buried and howling, under the ruins. There was, of course, a general rising of the company, some to rescue the struggling poodle, and others in vain solicitude to gather up the broken fragments of the once beautiful vase. It was a favourite object with Lady Hester; of singular rarity, both for form and design; and Kate stood speechless, and almost sick with shame and sorrow, at the sight, not heeding one syllable of the excuses and apologies poured in upon her, nor of the equally valueless assurances that it could be easily mended; that Martha was a perfect proficient in such arts; and that, if Scroope would only collect the pieces carefully, the most difficult connoisseur would not be able to detect a flaw in it.

"I've got a head here; but the no-nose is off," cried Purvis.

"Here it is, Scroope. I've found it."

"No, that's a toe," said he; "there's a nail to it."

"I am getting ill—I shall faint," said Mrs. Ricketts, retiring upon a well-cushioned sofa from the calamity.

Martha now flew to the bell-rope and pulled it violently, while Purvis threw open the window, and with such rash haste as to upset a stand of camellias, thereby scattering plants, buds, earth, and crockery over the floor, while poor Kate, thunderstruck at the avalanche of ruin around her, leaned against the wall for support, unable to stir or even speak. As Martha continued to tug away at the bell, the alarm, suggesting the idea of fire, brought three or four servants to the door together.

"Madeira! quick, Madeira!" cried Martha, as she unloosed various articles of dress from her sister's throat, and prepared a plan of operations for resuscitation that showed at least an experienced hand.

"Bring wine," said Kate, faintly, to the astonished butler, who, not noticing Miss Ricketts' order, seemed to await hers.

"Madeira! it must be Madeira!" cried Martha, mildly.

"She don't dislike Mar-Mar-Marco-brunner," whispered Purvis to the servant, "and I'll take a glass too."

Had the irruption been one of veritable housebreakers, had the occasion been what newspapers stereotype as a "Daring Burglary," Kate Dalton might, in all likelihood, have distinguished herself as a heroine. She would, it is more than probable, have evinced no deficiency either of courage or presence of mind, but in the actual contingency nothing could be more utterly helpless than she proved; and, as she glided into a chair, her pale face and trembling features betrayed more decisive signs of suffering than the massive countenance which Martha was now deluging with eau-de-Cologne and lavender.

The wine soon made its appearance; a very imposing array of restoratives—the ambulatory pharmacopœia of the Ricketts family—was all displayed upon a table. Martha, divested of shawl, bonnet, and gloves, stood ready for action; and thus, everything being in readiness, Mrs. Ricketts, whose consideration never suffered her to take people unawares, now began her nervous attack in all form.

If ague—hysterics—recovery from drowning—tic-douloureux, and an extensive burn had all sent representatives of their peculiar agonies, with injunctions to struggle for a mastery of expression, the symptoms could scarcely have equalled those now exhibited. There was not a contortion nor convulsion that her countenance did not undergo, while the devil's tattoo, kept up by her heels upon the floor, and her knuckles occasionally on the table, and now and then on Scroope's head, added fearfully to the effect of her screams, which varied from the deep groan of the melodrame to the wildest shrieks of tragedy.

"There's no danger, Miss Dalton," whispered Martha, whose functions of hand-rubbing, temple-bathing, wine-giving, and so forth, were performed with a most jog-trot regularity.

"When she sc-sc-screams, she's all right," added Purvis; and, certainly, the most anxious friend might have been comforted on the present occasion.

"Shall I not send for a physician?" asked Kate, eagerly.

"On no account, Miss Dalton. We are quite accustomed to these seizures. My dear sister's nerves are so susceptible."

"Yes," said Scroope, who, be it remarked, had already half finished a bottle of hock, "poor Zoe is all sensibility—the scabbard too sharp for the sword. Won't you have a glass of wine, Miss Dalton?"

"Thanks, sir, I take none. I trust she is better now—she looks easier."

"She is better; but this is a difficult moment," whispered Martha. "Any shock—any sudden impression now might prove fatal."

"What is to be done, then?" said Kate, in terror.

"She must be put to bed at once, the room darkened, and the strictest silence preserved. Can you spare your room?"

"Oh, of course, anything—everything at such a moment," cried the terrified girl, whose reason was now completely mastered by her fears.

"She must be carried. Will you give orders, Miss Dalton? and Scroope, step down to the carriage, and bring up ——" Here Miss Ricketts' voice degenerated into an inaudible whisper; but Scroope left the room to obey the command.

Her sympathy for suffering had so thoroughly occupied Kate, that all the train of unpleasant consequences that were to follow this unhappy incident had never once occurred to her; nor did a thought of Lady Hester cross her mind, till, suddenly, the whole flashed upon her, by the appearance of her maid Nina in the drawing-room.

"To your own room, mademoiselle?" asked she, with a look that said far more than any words.

"Yes, Nina," whispered she. "What can I do? She is so ill! They tell me it may be dangerous at any moment, and——"

"Hush, my dear Miss Dalton!" said Martha; "one word may wake her."

"I'd be a butterfly!" warbled the sick lady, in a low weak treble; while a smile of angelic beatitude beamed on her features.

"Hush! be still!" said Martha, motioning the surrounders to silence.

"What shall I do, Nina? Shall I go and speak to my lady?" asked Kate.

A significant shrug of the shoulders, more negative than affirmative, was the only answer.

"I'd be a gossamer, and you'd be the King of Thebes," said Mrs. Ricketts, addressing a tall footman, who stood ready to assist in carrying her.

"Yes, madam," said he, respectfully.

"She's worse," whispered Martha, gravely.

"And we'll walk on the wall of China by moonlight, with Cleopatra and Mr. Cobden?"

"Certainly, madam," said the man, who felt the question too direct for evasion.

"Has she been working slippers for the planet Ju-Ju-Jupiter yet?" asked Purvis, eagerly, as he entered the room, heated and flushed from the weight of a portentous bag of coloured wool.

"No; not yet," whispered Martha. "You may lift her now, gently—very gently, and not a word."

And in strict obedience, the servants raised their fair burden, and bore her from the room, after Nina, who led the way with an air that betokened a more than common indifference to human suffering.

"When she gets at Ju-Jupiter," said Purvis to Kate, as they closed the procession, "it's a bad symptom; or when she fancies she's Hec-Hec-Hec-Hec——"

"Hecate?"

"No; not Hec-Hecate, but Hecuba—Hecuba; then it's a month at least before she comes round."

"How dreadful!" said Kate. And certainly there was not a grain of hypocrisy in the fervour with which she uttered it.

"I don't think she'll go beyond the San-Sandwich Islands this time, however," added he consolingly.

"Hush, Scroope!" cried Martha. And now they entered the small and exquisitely furnished dressing-room which was appropriated to Kate's use; within which, and opening upon a small orangery, stood her bedroom.

Nina, who scrupulously obeyed every order of her young

mistress, continued the while to exhibit a hundred petty signs of mute rebellion.

"Lady Hester wishes to see Miss Dalton," said a servant at the outer door.

"Can you permit me for a moment?" asked Kate, in a tremor.

"Oh, of course, my dear Miss Dalton; let there be no ceremony with us," said Martha. "Your kindness makes us feel like old friends already."

"I feel myself quite at home," cried Scroope, whose head was not proof against so much wine; and then, turning to one of the servants, he added a mild request for the two bottles that were left on the drawing-room table.

Martha happily, however, overheard and revoked the order. And now the various attendants withdrew, leaving the family to themselves.

It was in no pleasant mood that Kate took her way toward's Lady Hester's apartment. The drawing-room, as she passed through it, still exhibited some of the signs of its recent ruin, and the servants were busied in collecting fragments of porcelain and flower-pots. Their murmured comments, hushed as she went by, told her how the occurrence was already the gossip of the household. It was impossible for her not to connect herself with the whole misfortune. "But for her"—— But she could not endure the thought, and it was with deep humiliation and trembling in every limb that she entered Lady Hester's chamber.

"Leave me, Celadon; I want to speak to Miss Dalton," said Lady Hester to the hairdresser, who had just completed one-half of her ladyship's *chevelure*, leaving the other side pinned and rolled up in those various preparatory stages which have more of promise than picturesque about them. Her cheek was flushed, and her eyes sparkled with an animation that betrayed more passion than pleasure.

"What is this dreadful story I've heard, child, and that the house is full of? Is it possible there can be any truth in it? Have these odious people actually dared to establish themselves here? Tell me, child—speak!"

"Mrs. Ricketts became suddenly ill," said Kate, trembling; "her dog threw down a china jar."

"Not my Sèvres jar?—not the large green one, with the figures?"

"I grieve to say it was!"

"Go on. What then?" said Lady Hester, dryly.

"Shocked at the incident, and alarmed, besides, by the fall of a flower-stand, she fainted away, and subsequently was seized with what I supposed to be a convulsive attack, but to which her friends seemed perfectly accustomed, and pronounced not dangerous. In this dilemma they asked me if they might occupy my room. Of course I could not refuse, and yet felt, the while, that I had no right to extend the hospitality of this house. I saw the indelicacy of what I was doing. I was shocked and ashamed, and yet——"

"Go on," said Lady Hester once more, and with a stern quietude of manner that Kate felt more acutely than even an angry burst of temper.

"I have little more to say; in fact, I know not what I am saying," cried she, gulping to repress the torrent of suffering that was struggling within her.

"Miss Dalton," began Lady Hester——

"Oh! why not Kate?" broke she in with a choking utterance.

"Miss Dalton," resumed Lady Hester, and as if not hearing the entreaty, "very little knowledge of that world you have lived in for the past three or four months might have taught you some slight self-possession in difficulty. Still less acquaintance with it might have suggested the recollection that these people are no intimates of mine; so that, even were tact wanting, feeling, at least, should have dictated a line of action to you."

"I know I have done wrong. I knew it at the time, and yet, in my inexperience, I could not decide on anything. My memory too, helped to mislead me, for I bethought me, that although these persons were not of your own rank and station, yet you had stooped lower than to them when you came to visit Nelly and myself."

"Humph!" ejaculated Lady Hester, with a gesture that very unequivocally seemed to say that her having done so was a grievous error. Kate saw it quickly, and

as suddenly the blood rushed to her cheek, colouring her throat and neck with the deep crimson of shame. A burst of pride—the old Dalton pride—seemed to have given way within her; and, as she drew herself up to her full height, her look and attitude wore every sign of haughty indignation.

Lady Hester looked at her for a few seconds with a glance of searching import. Perhaps for a moment, the possibility of a deception struck her, and that this might only be feigned; but as suddenly did she recognize the unerring traits of truth, and said,—

"What! child, are you angry with *me?*"

"Oh no, no!" said Kate, bursting into tears, and kissing the hand that was now extended towards her—"oh no, no! but I could hate myself for what seems so like ingratitude."

"Come, sit down here at my feet on this stool, and tell me all about it; for, after all, I could forgive them the jar and the camellias, if they'd only have gone away afterwards. And of course the lesson will not be thrown away upon you—not to be easily deceived again."

"How, deceived?" exclaimed Kate. "She was very ill. I saw it myself."

"Nonsense, child. The trick is the very stalest piece of roguery going. Since Toe Morris, as they call him—the man that treads upon people, and by his apologies scrapes acquaintance with them—there is nothing less original. Why, just before we left England, there was old Bankhead got into Slingsby House, merely because the newspapers might announce his death at the Earl of Grindleton's—'on the eighth, of a few days' illness, deeply regretted by the noble lord, with whom he was on a visit.' Now, that dear Ricketts woman would almost consent to take leave of the world for a similar paragraph. I'm sure I should know nothing of such people but that Sir Stafford's relations have somewhat enlightened me. He has a nest of cousins down in Shropshire, not a whit better than your—I was going to call them 'your friends,' the Rickettses."

"It is almost incredible to suppose this could be artifice."

"Why so, child? There is no strategy too deep for

people who are always aspiring to some society above them. Besides, after all, I was in a measure prepared for this."

"Prepared for it!"

"Yes; Jekyl told me that if they once got in, it would be next to impossible to keep them out afterwards. A compromise, he said, was the best thing; to let them have so many days each year, with certain small privileges about showing the house to strangers, cutting bouquets, and so on; or, if we preferred it, let them carry away a Teniers or a Gerard Dow to copy, and take care never to ask for it. He inclined to the latter as the better plan, because, after a certain lapse of time, it can end in a cut."

"But this is inconceivable!" exclaimed Kate.

"And yet half the absurd and incongruous intimacies one sees in the world have had some such origin, and habit will reconcile one to acquaintance that at first inspired feelings of abhorrence and detestation. I'm sure I don't know one good house in town where there are not certain intimates that have not the slightest pretension, either from rank, wealth, distinction, or social qualities, to be there. And yet, there they are; not merely as supernumeraries, either, but very prominent and foreground figures, giving advice and offering counsel on questions of family policy, and writing their vulgar names on every will, codicil, marriage-settlement, and trust-deed, till they seem to be part of the genealogical tree, to which, after all, they are only attached like fungi. You look very unhappy, my poor Kate, at all this; but, believe me, the system will outlive both of us. And so, now to your room, and dress for dinner. But I forgot; you haven't got a room; so Célestine must give you hers, and you will be close beside me, and we shall be the better able to concert measures about these Ricketts folk, who really resemble those amiable peasants your father told me of, on his Irish property, and whom he designated as 'squatters.' I am delighted that I haven't forgot the word."

And thus, chatting on, Lady Hester restored Kate's wonted happiness of nature, sadly shaken as it had been by the contrarieties of the morning. Nothing, too, was

easier than to make her forget a source of irritation. Ever better satisfied to look on the bright side of life, her inclinations needed but little aid from conviction to turn her from gloomy themes to pleasant ones; and already some of the absurdities of the morning were recurring to her mind, and little traits of Mrs. Ricketts and her brother were involuntarily coming up through all the whirlpool of annoyance and confusion in which they had been submerged.

The coming dinner, too, engrossed some share of her thoughts; for it was a grand entertainment, to which all Lady Hester's most distinguished friends were invited. An Archduke and a Cardinal were to make part of the company, and Kate looked forward to meeting these great personages with no common interest. It was less the vulgar curiosity of observing the manners and bearing of distinguished characters, than the delight she felt in following out some child-invented narrative of her future life—some fancied story of her own career, wherein Princes and Prelates were to figure, and scenes of splendour and enjoyment to follow each other in rapid succession.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF A "GRAND DINNER."

LADY HESTER'S dinner of that day was a "grand one,"—that is to say, it was one of those great displays which from time to time are offered up as sacrifices to the opinion of the world. Few of her own peculiar set were present. Some she omitted herself; others had begged off of their own accord. Midchekoff, however, was there; for, however accustomed to the tone and habits of a life of mere dissipation, he possessed every requirement for mixing with general society. It was true he was not fond of meeting "Royal Highnesses," before whom his own equivocal rank sank into insignificance; nor did he love "Cardinals," whose haughty pretensions always overtopped every other nobility. To oblige Lady Hester, however, he did come, and condescended, for "the nonce," to assume his most amiable of moods. The Marchesa Guardoni, an old coquette of the days of the French Empire, but now a rigid devotee, and a most exclusive moralist; a few elderly diplomates, of a quiet and cat-like smoothness of manner; with certain notabilities of the Court, made up the party. There were no English whatever; Jekyl, who made out the list, well knowing that Florence offered none of a rank sufficiently distinguished, except Norwood, whose temporary absence from the city was rather a boon than the reverse; for the noble viscount, when not "slang," was usually silent, and, by long intercourse with the Turf and its followers, had ceased to feel any interest in topics which could not end in a wager.

The entertainment was very splendid. Nothing was wanting which luxury or taste could contribute. The wines were delicious; the cookery perfect. The guests were courteous and pleasing; but all was of the quietest.

None of the witty sallies, the piquant anecdotes, the brilliant repartees, which usually pattered like hail around that board. Still less were heard those little histories of private life where delinquencies furnish all the interest. The Royal guest imposed a reserve which the presence of the Cardinal deepened. The conversation, like the *cuisine*, was flavoured for fine palates: both were light, suggestive, and of easy digestion. Events were discussed rather than the actors in them. All was ease and simplicity; but it was a stately kind of simplicity, which served to chill those that were unaccustomed to it. So Kate Dalton felt it; and, however sad the confession, we must own that she greatly preferred the free and easy tone of Lady Hester's midnight receptions to the colder solemnity of these distinguished guests.

Even to the Cardinal's whist-table everything wore a look of state and solemnity. The players laid down their cards with a measured gravity, and scored their honours with the air of men discharging a high and important function. As for the Archduke, he sat upon a sofa beside Lady Hester, suffering himself to be amused by the resources of her small-talk, bowing blandly at times, occasionally condescending to a smile, but rarely uttering even a monosyllable. Even that little social warmth that was kindled by the dinner table seemed to have been chilled by the drawing-room, where the conversation was maintained in a low, soft tone, that never rose above a murmur. It may be, perhaps, some sort of consolation to little folk to think that Princes are generally sad-looking. The impassable barrier of reserve around them, if it protect from all the rubs and frictions of life, equally excludes from much of its genial enjoyment; and all those little pleasantries which grow out of intimacy are denied those who have no equals.

It was in some such meditation as this Kate Dalton sat, roused occasionally to bestow a smile or a passing word of acknowledgment in return for some of those little morsels of compliment and flattery which old courtiers pay as their rightful tribute to a young and handsome woman. She was sufficiently accustomed to this kind of homage to accept it without losing, even for an instant, any train of thought her mind was pursuing. Nor did the entrance of

any new guest, a number of whom had been invited for the evening, distract her from her half reverie.

The *salons*, without being crowded, now showed a numerous company, all of whom exhibited in their demeanour that respectful reserve the presence of royalty ever inspires. It seemed, indeed, as though all the conversation that went forward was like a mere "aside" to that more important dialogue which was maintained beside the prince.

A slow but measured tide of persons passed before him, bowing with respectful deference as they went. With some he deigned to speak a few words, others had a smile or a little nod of recognition, and some again one of those cold and vacant stares with which great people are occasionally wont to regard little ones. His Royal Highness was not one of those accomplished princes whose pride it is to know the name, the family, the pursuits, and predilections of each new presentee; on the contrary, he was absent, and forgetful to a degree scarcely credible; his want of memory betraying him into innumerable mistakes, from which, even had he known, no adroitness of his own could have extricated him. On this evening he had not been peculiarly fortunate; he had complimented a minister who had just received his recall in disgrace—he had felicitated a young lady on her approaching marriage, which had been broken off; while the burden of his talk to Lady Hester was in disparagement of those foreigners who brought a scandal upon his court by habits and manners which would not be tolerated in their own countries. Divorce, or even separation, met his heavy reprobation; and while his code of morality, on the whole, exhibited very merciful dispositions, he bestowed unmitigated severity upon all that could shock the world's opinion.

To this Lady Hester had to listen as best she might—a task not the less trying and difficult from the ill-suppressed looks of malice and enjoyment she saw on every side. From all these causes put together, the occasion, however flattering to her vanity, was far from being pleasurable to her feelings, and she longed for it to be over. The prince looked wearied enough, but somehow there is nothing like royalty for endurance; their whole

lives would seem to teach the lesson, and so he sat on, saying a stray word, bowing with half-closed lids, and looking as though very little more would set him fast asleep.

It was the very culminating point of the whole evening's austerity; one of those little pauses which now and then occur had succeeded to the murmur of conversation. The whist party had been broken up, and the cardinal was slowly advancing up the room, the company, even to the ladies, rising respectfully as he passed, when the folding-doors were thrown wide, and a servant announced Mr. Scroope Purvis.

If the name was unknown to the assembled guests, there was one there at least who heard it with a sensation of actual terror, and poor Kate Dalton sank back into her chair with a kind of instinctive effort at concealment. By this time the door had closed behind him, leaving Mr. Purvis standing with an expression of no small bewilderment at the gorgeous assembly into which he had intruded.

Lady Hester's quick ear had caught the name, even from the furthest end of the room, but, while she attributed it to the mispronunciations of which foreign servants are so liberal, looked out with some curiosity for him who owned it.

Nor had she to look long, for, his first moment of surprise over, Purvis put up his double eye-glass and commenced a tour of the rooms, in that peculiarly scrutinizing way for which he was distinguished. The fact that all the faces were unknown to him seemed to impart additional courage to his investigations, for he stared about with as little concern as he might have done in a theatre.

Most men in his situation would have been egoist enough to have thought only of themselves and the awkwardness of their own position. Purvis, on the contrary, had an eye for everything; from the chandeliers on the walls to the crosses on the dress-coats—from the decorations of the *salons* to the diamonds—he missed nothing; and with such impartial fairness did he bestow his glances, that the cardinal's cheeks grew red as his own stockings

as Scroope surveyed him. At last he reached the end of the great drawing-room, and found himself standing in front of the canopied seat where the archduke sat with Lady Hester. Not heeding, if he even remarked, the little circle which etiquette had drawn in front of the prince, Purvis advanced within the charmed precincts and stared steadily at the duke.

"I perceive that one of your friends is most anxious to pay his respects to you, Lady Hester," said the prince, with a very peculiar smile.

"I beg to assure you, sir, that the gentleman is unknown to me; his presence here is an honour for which I am totally unprepared."

"My name is Purvis, madam—Sc-Sc-Scroope Purvis. Miss Dalton knows me; and my sister is Mrs. Ricketts."

"You will find Miss Dalton yonder, sir," said Lady Hester, all whose efforts were barely sufficient to restrain her temper.

"I see her!" cried Purvis, putting his glass up; "but she's trying to escape me. She's got a man with a re-red beard before her, but it won't do—I'm too sh-sh-sharp for that."

The Archduke laughed, and heartily, too, at this sally; and Purvis, emboldened by the complaisance, edged more closely towards him to point out the lady in question. "She has a droll kind of sc-sc-scarf in her hair. There! don't you see her now? Have you ever seen the pictures in the Pitti Palace?"

The question was a little startling, as the personage to whom it was addressed had his residence there. The Archduke, however, merely bowed in acquiescence, and Purvis went on: "My sister Zoe copied one—and I like it better than the Ti-Tit-Titian itself. We smoked it, too, and made it look so brown, you'd never guess it to be mo-mo-mo-modern."

To judge from the bewildered look of the duke, the whole of this speech was pure Chaldee to him; and when he turned to Lady Hester for an explanation, he discovered that she had left her seat. Whether mistaking the motion as an invitation to be seated, or merely acting by his own impulses, Scroope crossed over and sat down

on the sofa with a degree of self-satisfaction that lighted up all his features.

"You're not one of the fa-family, are you?" asked he.

"I have not that honour," said the prince, with a bow.

"I thought not. I suspected that there was a tw-tw-twang in your English that looked foreign, but I know your face quite well."

The duke bowed again.

"Pretty rooms these," said Purvis, with his glass to his eye; "what a d-d-deal of money they must have cost. They're going it fast, these Onslows."

"Indeed!" said the prince, who only half understood the remark.

"I know it," said Scroope, with a confidential wink. "Their butcher se-se-serves us, and he won't give anything till they have sent their orders; and as for wine, they drink Bordeaux in the servants' hall. I don't know what *you* have, but a d-d-deuced sight better than ever *I* get."

"Good wine, however, can be had here, I hope," said the duke, blandly.

"Yes, if you sm-sm-smuggle it," said Scroope, with a knowing cackle; while, to add poignancy to the remark, he nudged the prince with his elbow. "That's the only way to have it. The st-stupid Government sees nothing."

"Is that the case, sir?" asked the prince, with a degree of interest he had not manifested before.

"To be sure it is. My sister Zoe never pays duty on anything, and if you like your c-c-cigars cheap, just t-t-tell me, that's all. The G-G-Grand-Duke never got a sixpence of my money yet, and if I kn-know myself, he never shall."

"Do you bear him any grudge, sir, that you say this so emphatically?"

"No; not at all. They tell me that he's good-hearted, although somewhat we-weak in the a-a-attic story"—and here Scroope tapped his forehead significantly—"but that's in the family. My sister Zoe could tell you such st-stories about them, you'd die of laughing; and then there's Jekyl takes them off so well! It's c-c-capital fun. He gives a dia-dia-dialogue between the Grand-Duke and the Pope's Nuncio that's better than a farce."

How far Mr. Purvis might have been carried in his zeal to be agreeable there is no saying, when Lady Hester came up with Kate leaning on her arm.

"This gentleman claims acquaintance with you, Miss Dalton," said she, haughtily.

"Oh, to be sure, she knows me; and I have a letter from her—her fa-father," said Purvis, drawing forth a packet like a postman's.

"Miss Dalton would prefer being seated, sir," said Lady Hester, while she motioned towards another part of the room.

"Yes, yes, of course; we'll find out a snug co-corner somewhere for a chat; just take my arm, will you? Let us get away from all these great 'Dons,' with their stars and crosses." And, without waiting for Kate's reply, he drew her arm within his own, and set out in that little shuffling trot which he always assumed when he fancied he had business on hand.

The ridicule of being associated with such a companion would at any other moment have overwhelmed Kate Dalton with shame, but now, whether from the few words which Lady Hester had whispered in her ear, whether the fact of his unauthorized appearance, or whether it were the dread of some greater disgrace to follow, she actually felt a sense of relief in the continuous flow of twaddle which he kept up as they passed down the room.

"Who was that smiled as we passed?" asked he.

"Prince Midchekoff."

"Oh, that was he, was it? You must introduce me."

"Not now—pray, not now; at any other time," cried she, in perfect terror.

"Well, but don't forget it. Zoe would never forgive me if I told her that I lost the op-op-opportunity; she wants to know him so very much."

"Of course, at another time," said Kate, hurrying him along with increasing speed.

"Who's he?" asked Purvis, as a tall and stately personage bowed blandly to Kate.

"The Austrian Minister."

"Not the fellow that st-st-strangled the Emperor? Oh, I forgot; he was a Russian, wasn't he? They got him

down, and ch-ch-choked him—ha! ha! ha! There's a man with a red moustache, so like the fellow who sells the bou-bou-bouquets at the Cascini."

"A Hungarian magnate," whispered Kate.

"Is he, though? Then let's have another look at him. He has as many gold chains about him as a shop on the Ponte Vecchio. Zoe would like him, he's so odd!"

At last, but not without great efforts, Kate succeeded in reaching a small chamber, where two others already were seated, and whose figures were undistinguishable in the obscurity of a studiously shaded lamp.

"Isn't it strange, she never asked for Zoe?" said Purvis, as he took his seat on a sofa; "not to inquire for a person sick under her own r-r-roof?"

"Lady Hester is not acquainted with Mrs. Ricketts."

"Well, but sh-sh-she ought to be. Zoe made a party for her; a d-d-dinner party; and had Hagg-Haggerstone and Foglass, and the rest of them. And after all, you know, they are only b-bankers, these Onslows, and needn't give themselves airs."

"You have a letter for me, Mr. Purvis? Will you pardon my impatience——"

"Yes, to be sure. I've a letter, and an enclosure in it, too; at least, it feels crisp like a note—a bank-note: that's the reason you're impatient; perhaps the re-re-remittance was long a-coming, eh?"

Kate made no reply to this speech, but her cheek grew scarlet as she heard it.

Purvis, meanwhile, spread his packet of papers before him, and began his search for Dalton's letter.

"No, that ain't it; that's from Foglass, all about Norwood, and his N-N-Newmarket affair. That's a letter from Lord Gullston's valet, with such a droll ac-account of the whole family. Zoe recom-mended him; and the poor fellow's very grateful, for he writes about all that goes on in the house. Lady G., it seems, has the temper of a f-f-fiend. Well, don't be im-impatient; I'll find your father's letter in a minute. He writes such a cr-cr-cramp old hand, one should detect it at once. I ta-take it that he's a bit of a character, the old gen-gentleman. I'm

sure he is; but what have I done with his letter? Oh! here it is! here it is! and 'with haste' written on the corner, too."

Kate caught the letter impatiently, and, without any thought for Purvis or the place, tore it open at once. In doing so, the enclosure fell to the ground without her perceiving it; and, stranger still, it escaped the attention of Purvis; but that worthy man, not exactly venturing to read over her shoulder, had established himself directly in front, where, with his double eye-glass, he scanned every change in her features during the perusal.

"All well at home, I hope, eh? How she changes colour," muttered he to himself. "Nobody ill; nobody dead, eh?" asked he, louder. "It must be something serious, though; she's trembling like ague. Let me give you a chair; that is, if I can f-find one in this little den; they've got nothing but d-divans all round it." And he hurried forth into the larger *salon* in search of a seat.

It was not without considerable trouble to himself and inconvenience to various others that he at last succeeded, and returned to the boudoir with a massive arm-chair in his hands; but what was his dismay to find that Miss Dalton had made her escape in the meanwhile. In vain did he seek her through the *salons*, which now were rapidly thinning; the distinguished guests having already departed.

A stray group lingered here and there, conversing in a low tone; and around the fires were gathered little knots of ladies muffled and cloaked, and only waiting for the carriages. It was like a stage, when the performance was over! Scarcely deigning to notice the little man, who, with palpable keenness of scrutiny, pursued his search in every quarter, they gradually moved off, leaving Purvis alone to tread the "banquet-hall deserted." The servants, as they extinguished the lights, passed and repassed him without remark; so that, defeated and disappointed, he was obliged at last to retire, sorrowfully confessing to his own heart how little success had attended his bold enterprise.

As he passed along the galleries and descended the stairs, he made various little efforts to open a conversation

with some one or other of the servants; but these dignified officials responded to his questions in the driest and shortest manner; and it was only as he reached the great gate of the palace that he chanced upon one courteous enough to hear him to the end in his oft-repeated question of "Who was th-th-that with the large st-st-star on his breast, and a wh-wh-white beard?"

The porter stared at the speaker, and said, respectfully,

"The signor probably means the Archduke?"

"Not the Archduke Fr-Fr-Fr——"

"Yes, sir," said the man; and closed the heavy door after him, leaving Purvis in a state of astonishment, and as much shame as his nature permitted him to feel. Neither upon himself nor his sensations have we any intention to dwell; and leaving him to pursue his way homeward, we beg to return once more within those walls from which he had just taken his departure.

If Lady Hester's grand company had gone, the business of the evening was by no means over; on the contrary, it was the hour of her night receptions, and now the accustomed guests of those favoured precincts came dropping in from theatres, and operas, and late dinners. These men of pleasure looked jaded and tired, as usual; and, except the little tinkling sounds of Jekyl's small treble, no other voice sounded as they walked along the corridors.

When they entered Lady Hester's boudoir, they found that lady recounting to Midchekoff the whole circumstances of the morning's adventure—a recital which she continued without other interruption than a smile or a nod, or a little gesture of the hand to each of the new arrivals as he came in. If the lady's manner was devoid of all ceremony, that of the gentlemen was less ceremonious still, for they stretched themselves on divans, rested their legs upon chairs, and stood back to the fire, with a degree of careless ease that bespoke them thoroughly at home,—Jekyl, perhaps, the only one present who mingled with this freedom a certain courteous respect that no familiarity made him ever forget.

"And they are still here?" asked the prince. "Actually in the house at this moment?"

"At this very moment!" responded she, emphatically.

"The whole thing passes belief," exclaimed he.

And now the listless loungers drew their chairs closer to hear the story, and laugh, as men do, who are seldom moved to mirth save when ridicule or malice are the provocatives.

"But you haven't heard the worst yet," said Midchekoff. "Pray tell them of your visitor of this evening."

And Lady Hester narrated the appearance of Mr. Purvis, who, having secured his entrance by a visit to his sister, had so unceremoniously presented himself in the drawing-room.

"Heaven knows what he said to his Royal Highness when I was away. To judge from his face, it must have been something atrocious; and the last thing he said on leaving was, 'I must try and not forget your agreeable friend's name.'"

"You might as well have invited *me* as have had your 'friend' Purvis, after all," said a young Italian noble, whose political opinions found no favour at court.

"But what do you mean to do, my lady?" asked Midchekoff. "Is the enemy to hold undisputed possession of the fortress?"

"It is precisely on that point I want advice, prince."

"What if we form ourselves into a council of state?" said an Austrian general.

"By all means," said the others, who now formed a semicircle in front of Lady Hester's sofa.

"The youngest officer always speaks first," said the Austrian.

"Then that duty is mine," said a little man of about eighty-two or three, and who had represented France at half the courts of Europe. "I should advise a protocol in the form of a protest. It is a palpable invasion of territory, but, followed by an ample apology and a speedy evacuation, may be forgiven. There are historical warrants for such transgressions being accepted as acts almost of compulsion."

"The case of Anspach, for instance," said the Austrian, with a malicious smile.

"Precisely, general—precisely a case in point," rejoined the old diplomate, with a bow and a smile that

almost seemed grateful. "The shortest road to victory is ever the best."

"Let's try a fever, or a fire; by Jove! the sacrifice of a few chairs and window-curtains would be a cheap alternative," said George Onslow.

"Why not essay a compromise, my lady?" interposed a young German secretary of legation; "a mixed garrison, like that of Rastadt?"

"Lady Hester's troops to mount guard alternately with the Ricketts's. Downright treason—base treason!" exclaimed another.

"What would you think of a special mission, my lady?" simpered Jekyl. "It would at least serve to enlighten us as to the views of the enemy. The discussion of the past often throws much light on the future."

"Jekyl wants to earn a decoration," said another, laughing; "he intends to be the envoy himself."

"I'll wager that I know Midchekoff's policy," said a young Sicilian, who always spoke with a frank fearlessness that is most rare with other Italians.

"Well let us hear it," said the prince, gravely.

"You would counsel the national expedient of retiring before the enemy, and making the country too cold to hold them?"

"How absurd!" said Lady Hester, half angrily; "give up one's house to a set of people who have had the impertinence to intrude themselves unasked?"

"And yet Giasconi is right," said the prince. "It is the best suggestion we have heard yet. Hostilities imply, to a certain extent, equality; negotiation is an acknowledgment of acquaintanceship; a dignified retreat, however, avoids either difficulty."

"In that case, let's starve them out," said George. "Suffer no supplies to be thrown into the place, and exact the most humble terms of submission."

"Then, where to go? that's another question," said Lady Hester.

"His eminence expects to see you in Rome," whispered the abbé, who had waited for an opportunity for the suggestion. "I believe he relies on a promise."

"Very true; but not just yet. Besides, the season is almost over," said Lady Hester, with a slight degree of confusion.

"Don't be frightened, abbé," whispered Jekyl in D'Esmonde's ear. "Her ladyship is assuredly 'going to Rome' later on."

The priest smiled, with an expression that told how fully he comprehended the phrase.

"There's a little villa of mine, on the Lake of Como, very much at your service," said Midchekoff, with the easy indifference of one suggesting something perfectly indifferent to him.

"Do you mean La Rocca, prince?" added the Sicilian.

"Yes. They tell me it is prettily situated, but I've never seen it. The Empress passed a few weeks there last year, and liked it," said Midchekoff, languidly.

"Really, prince, if I don't know how to accept, I am still more at a loss for power to refuse your offer."

"When will you go?" said he, dryly, and taking out his memorandum-book to write.

"What says Mr. Jekyl?" said Lady Hester, turning to that bland personage, who, without apparently attending to what went forward, had heard every syllable of it.

"This is Tuesday," said Jekyl. "There's not much to be done; the villa wants for nothing: I know it perfectly."

"Ah! it's comfortable, then?" said the prince, with a slight degree of animation.

"La Rocca is all that Contarete's taste could make it," replied Jekyl.

"Poor Contarete! he was an excellent *maître d'hôtel*," said Midchekoff. "He's still with me, somewhere; I rather believe in Tartary, just now."

"Your ladyship may leave this on Thursday," said Jekyl, who well knew that he was paying the most flattering compliment to Midchekoff in naming the shortest possible time for preparation.

"Will this be inconvenient, prince?" asked Lady Hester.

"No; not in the least. If Jekyl will precede you by a couple of hours, I trust all will be ready."

"With your permission, then, we will say Thursday," said she, who, with her habitual delight in novelty, was already wild with pleasure at the whole scheme.

"Perhaps I'll come and visit you," said Midchekoff. "I shall have to go to Vienna soon."

Lady Hester bowed and smiled her acknowledgments for this not over-gracious speech.

"May we follow you, too, Lady Hester?" asked the Sicilian.

"We expect that much from your loyalty, gentlemen. Our exile will test your fidelity."

"There's something or other inconvenient about the stables," said Midchekoff, "but I forget what it is; they are up a mountain, or down in a valley. I don't remember it, but the Emperor said it was wrong, and should be changed."

"They are on the opposite side of the lake, prince," interposed Jekyl, "and you must cross over to your carriage by boat."

"Oh, delightful—quite delightful!" exclaimed Lady Hester, with childish joy, at the novelty.

"La Rocca is on a little promontory," said Jekyl, "only approachable from the water, for the mountain is quite inaccessible."

"You shall have a road made, if you wish it," said the prince, languidly.

"On no account. I wouldn't for the world destroy the isolation of the spot."

"Do you happen to remember, Mr. Jekyl, if there be any pictures there?"

"There are some perfect gems, by Greuze."

"Oh! that's where they are, is it? I could never call to mind where they were left."

The conversation now became general, in discussing Lady Hester's change of abode, the life they should all lead when on the Lake, and the innumerable stories that would be circulated to account for her sudden departure. This same mystery was not the least agreeable feature of the whole, and Lady Hester never wearied in talking of all the speculations her new step was certain to originate; and although some of the company regretted the approach-

ing closure of a house which formed the resource of every evening, others were not sorry at the prospect of anything which offered a change to the monotony of their lives.

"You'll come to breakfast to-morrow, Mr. Jekyl," said Lady Hester, as he followed the departing guests. "I shall want you the whole day."

He bowed with his hand to his heart, and never did features of like mould evince a deeper aspect of devotion.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JEKYL'S COUNSELS.

One of the most striking characteristics of our present age is the singular mixture of frivolity and seriousness—the almost absurd contrast between grave inquiry and reckless dissipation, which pervades the well-to-do classes. Never was there a period when merely sensual gratification was more highly prized and paid for; and never, perhaps, a time when every rank in life was more eager in the pursuit of knowledge. To produce this state of things a certain compromise was necessary, and while the mere man of pleasure affected a taste for literature and politics, the really active-minded either sought his relaxation, or extended his influence, by mingling in scenes of frivolity and amusement.

The age which made dandies philosophers, made lord chancellors droll, and bishops eccentric. A paradoxical spirit was abroad, and it seemed to be a matter of pride with every one to do something out of his station. The whole temper of society and the tone of conversation exhibited this new taste.

Lady Hester Onslow was not a bad specimen of the prevailing mania. There was by nature a certain fidgety, capricious volatility about her that defied everything like a regular pursuit or a continued purpose. With a reasonably quick apprehension and no judgment, in being everything, she became nothing. Always mistaking sympathies for convictions, it was quite sufficient to interest her imagination to secure her adhesion, not, indeed, that it was worth much when obtained, seeing that she was but a feeble ally at the best. Her employment of the day was a type of herself. The mornings were passed in mesmeric experiences with her doctor, or what she fancied were theological discussions with the Abbé D'Esmonde. It would be difficult to say in which the imaginative exaltation more predominated. All the authentic and incredible phenomena of the one, all the miraculous pretensions of the other, were too little for a credulity that stopped at nothing. Of second sight, remote sympathy, and saintly miracles she never could hear enough. "Give me facts," she would say; by which she meant narratives. "I will have no theories, doctor." "Don't bear me down with arguments, Monsieur l'Abbé." "Facts, and facts alone, have any influence with *me*."

Now, such facts as she asked for were easily obtainable, and the greatest miser need not have grudged her an ample meal of them. Many of the facts, too, possessed the pleasing feature of being personal in their interest. One day it was a charming young patient of the doctor, who, having touched a tress of Lady Hester's hair, made the most astonishing revelations of her ladyship's disposition; telling facts of her feelings, her nature, and even her affections, that "she knew were only confided to her own heart." Various little incidents of her daily life were foretold, even to such minute matters as the purchase of articles of jewellery, which she had not even seen at the time, and only met her eyes by accident afterwards. The abbé, with equal success, assured her of the intense interest taken in her by the Church. Beautifully bound and richly illustrated books were offered to her, with the flattering addition that prayers were then being uttered at many a shrine for her enlightenment in their perusal.

Less asked to conform herself to a new belief than to reconcile the faith to her own notions, she was given the very widest latitude to her opinions. If she grew impatient at argument, a subtle illustration, an apt metaphor, or sometimes a happy *mot* settled the question. The abbé was a clever talker, and varied his subjects with all the skill of a master. He knew how to invoke to his aid all that poetry, art, and romance could contribute. The theme was a grand one when the imagination was to be interested, and really deserved a better listener, for save when the miraculous interposition of saints, or the gaudy ceremonials of the Church were spoken of, she heard the subject with indifference, if not apathy. The consideration of self could, however, always bring her back; and it was ever a successful flattery to assure her how fervently such a cardinal prayed for her "right-mindedness," and how eagerly even his Holiness looked forward to the moment of counting her among his children.

Her very tastes—those same tastes that ascetic Protestantism was always cavilling at—were beautifully Roman. The Church liked display. Witness her magnificence and splendour, her glorious cathedrals, the pomp and grandeur of her ceremonial! As to music, the choir of the "Duomo" was seraphic, and needed not the association of the dim vaulted aisles, the distant altar, and the chequered rays of stained-glass windows to wrap the soul in a fervour of enthusiasm. Even beauty was cherished by the Church, and the fair Madonnas were types of an admiring love that was beautifully catholic in its worship.

With all this, the work of conversion was a Penelope's web, that must each day be begun anew, for, as the hour of the Cascini drew nigh, Lady Hester's carriage drew up, and mesmerism, miracles, and all gave way to the fresher interests of courtly loungers, chit-chat, and "bouquets of camellias."

For the next hour or so, her mind was occupied with the gossiping stories of Florentine life, its surface details all recounted by the simpering dandies who gathered around her carriage; its deeper—not unfrequently darker—histories being the province of Mr. Albert Jekyl. Then home to luncheon, for, as Haggerstone related, she

dined always after the Opera, and it was then, somewhere verging on midnight, that she really began to live. Then, in all the blaze of dress and jewels, with beauty little impaired by years, and a manner the perfection of that peculiar school to which she attached herself, she was indeed a most attractive person.

Kate Dalton's life was, of course, precisely the same. Except the few hours given to controversial topics, and which she passed in reading, and the occasional change from driving to riding in the Cascini, Kate's day was exactly that of her friend. Not, however, with the same results; for while one was wearied with the same routine of unvarying pleasure, tired of the monotonous circle of amusement, the other became each day more and more enamoured of a life so unchanging in its happiness. What was uniformity to Lady Hester, imparted a sense of security to Kate. It was not alone the splendour that surrounded her, the thousand objects of taste and elegance that seemed to multiply around them, that captivated her so much, it was the absence of all care, the freedom from every thought that this state was a mere passing one. This Kate felt to be the very highest of enjoyments, and when at night she whispered to herself, "To-morrow will be like to-day," she had said everything that could brighten anticipation.

Her father's letter was the first shock to this delightful illusion. Her own false position of splendour, in contrast to his poverty, now came up palpably before her, and in place of those blissful reveries in which she often passed hours, there rose to her mind the bitter self-accusings of a penitent spirit. She never slept through the night; the greater part of it she spent in tears. Her absence from home, brief as it was, was quite enough to make her forget much of its daily life. She could, it is true, recall the penury and the privation, but not the feelings that grew out of them. "How changed must he have become to stoop to this!" was the exclamation that she uttered again and again. "Where was all that Dalton pride they used to boast of? What become of that family dignity which once was their bulwark against every blow of fortune?"

To these thoughts succeeded the sadder one, of what

course remained for her to adopt?—a difficulty the greater since she but half understood what was required of her. He spoke of a bill, and yet the letter contained none: before she broke the seal, it felt as though there was an enclosure, yet she found none; and if there were of what use would it be? It was perfectly impossible that she could approach Sir Stafford with such a request; every sense of shame, delicacy, and self-respect revolted at the very thought. Still less could she apply to Lady Hester, whose extravagant and wasteful habits always placed her in want of money; and yet to refuse her father on grounds which he would deem purely selfish was equally out of the question. She well knew that in a moment of anger and impatience—stung by what he would call the ingratitude of his children—he would probably himself write to Sir Stafford, narrating every circumstance that drove him to the step. Oh, that she had never left him—never ceased to live the life of want and hardship to which time had accustomed her! all the poverty she had ever known brought no such humiliation as this! Poor Nelly's lot now was a hundredfold superior to hers. She saw, too, that reserve once broken on such a theme, her father would not scruple to renew the application as often as he needed money. It was clear enough that he saw no embarrassment, nor any difficulty for her in the matter; that it neither could offend her feelings nor compromise her position. Could she descend to an evasive or equivocal reply, his temper would as certainly boil over, and an insulting letter would at once be addressed to Sir Stafford. Were she to make the request and fail, he would order her home, and under what circumstances should she leave the house of her benefactors! And yet all this was better than success.

In such harassing reflections warring and jarring in her mind, the long hours of the night were passed. She wept, too: the bitterest tears are those that are wrung from shame and sorrow mingled. Many a generous resolve, many a thought of self-devotion and sacrifice rose to her mind; at moments she would have submitted herself to any wound to self-esteem to have obtained her father's kind word, and at others all the indignity of a false position

overwhelmed her, and she cried as if her very heart were bursting.

Wearied and fevered, she arose and went into the garden. It was one of the brilliant mornings which—for a week or ten days—in Italy represent the whole season of spring. Although still early, the sun was hot, and the flowers and shrubs, refreshed by the heavy dew, were bursting out into renewed luxuriance in the warm glow. The fountains sparkled, and the birds were singing, and all seemed animated by that joyous spirit which seems the very breath of early morning. All save poor Kate, who, with bent-down head and slow step, loitered along the walks, lost in her gloomiest thoughts.

To return home again was the only issue she could see to her difficulties, to share the humble fortunes of her father and sister, away from a world in which she had no pretension to live! And this, too, just when that same world had cast its fascinations round her—just when its blandishments had gained possession of her heart, and made her feel that all without its pale was ignoble and unworthy. No other course seemed, however, to offer itself, and she had just determined on its adoption, when the short, quick step of some one following her made her turn her head. As she did so, her name was pronounced, and Mr. Albert Jekyl, with his hat courteously removed, advanced towards her.

"I see with what care Miss Dalton protects the roses of her cheeks," said he, smiling; "and yet how few there are that know this simple secret."

"You give me a credit I have no claim to, Mr. Jekyl. I have almost forgotten the sight of a rising sun, but this morning I did not feel quite well—a headache—a sleepless night——"

"Perhaps caused by anxiety," interposed he, quietly. "I wish I had discovered your loss in time, but I only detected that it must be yours when I reached home."

"I don't comprehend you," said she, with some hesitation.

"Is not this yours, Miss Dalton?" said he, producing the bill, which had fallen unseen from her father's letter. "I found it on the floor of the small boudoir, and not

paying much attention to it at the time, did not perceive the signature, which would at once have betrayed the ownership."

"It must have dropped from a letter I was reading," said Kate, whose cheek was now scarlet, for she knew Jekyl well enough to be certain that her whole secret was by that time in his hands. Slighter materials than this would have sufficed for his intelligence to construct a theory upon. Nothing in his manner, however, evinced this knowledge, for he handed her the paper with an air of most impassive quietude; while, as if to turn her thoughts from any unpleasantness of the incident, he said,—

"You haven't yet heard, I suppose, of Lady Hester's sudden resolve to quit Florence?"

"Leave Florence! and for where?" asked she, hurriedly.

"For Midchekoff's villa at Como. We discussed it all last night after you left, and in twenty-four hours we are to be on the road."

"What is the reason of this hurried departure?"

"The Ricketts invasion gives the pretext; but of course you know better than I do what a share the novelty of the scheme lends to its attractions."

"And we are to leave this to-morrow?" said Kate, rather to herself than for her companion.

Jekyl marked well the tone and the expression of the speaker, but said not a word.

Kate stood for a few seconds lost in thought. Her difficulties were thickening around her, and not a gleam of light shone through the gloomy future before her. At last, as it were overpowered by the torturing anxieties of her situation, she covered her face with her hands to hide the tears that would gush forth in spite of her.

"Miss Dalton will forgive me," said Jekyl, speaking in a low and most respectful voice, "if I step for once from the humble path I have tracked for myself in life, and offer my poor services as her adviser."

Nothing could be more deferential than the speech, or the way in which it was uttered, and yet Kate heard it with a sense of pain. She felt that her personal independence was already in peril, and that the meek and bashful

Mr. Jekyl had gained a mastery over her. He saw all this, he read each struggle of her mind, and, were retreat practicable, he would have retreated; but, the step once taken, the only course was "forwards."

"Miss Dalton may reject my counsels, but she will not despise the devotion in which they are proffered. A mere accident"—here he glanced at the paper which she still held in her fingers—"a mere accident has shown me that you have a difficulty; one for which neither your habits nor knowledge of life can suggest the solution." He paused, and a very slight nod from Kate emboldened him to proceed. "Were it not so, Miss Dalton—were the case one for which your own exquisite tact could suffice, I never would have ventured on the liberty. I, who have watched you with wondering admiration, directing and guiding your course amid shoals, and reefs, and quicksands, where the most skilful might have found shipwreck, it would have been hardihood indeed for *me* to have offered my pilotage. But here, if I err not greatly, here is a new and unknown sea, and here I may be of service to you."

"Is it so plain, then, what all this means?" said Kate, holding out the bill towards Jekyl.

"Alas! Miss Dalton," said he, with a faint smile, "these are no enigmas to us who mix in all the worries and cares of life."

"Then how do you read the riddle?" said she, almost laughing at the easy flippancy of his tone.

"Mr. Dalton being an Irish gentleman of a kind disposition and facile temper, suffers his tenantry to run most grievously into arrear. They won't pay, and he won't make them; his own creditors having no sympathy with such proceedings, become pressing and importunate. Mr. Dalton grows angry, and they grow irritable; he makes his agent write to *them*, they 'instruct' their attorney to write to *him*. Mr. D. is puzzled, and were it not that—— But, may I go on?"

"Of course; proceed," said she, smiling.

"You'll not be offended, though?" said he, "because, if I have not the privilege of being frank, I shall be worthless to you."

"There is no serious offence without intention."

"Very true; but I do not wish there should be even a trivial transgression."

"I'm not afraid. Go on," said she, nodding her head.

"Where was I, then? Oh! I remember. I said that Mr. Dalton, seeing difficulties thickening and troubles gathering, suddenly bethinks him that he has a daughter, a young lady of such attractions that, in a society where wealth and splendour and rank hold highest place, her beauty has already established a dominion which nothing, save her gentleness, prevents being a despotism."

"Mr. Jekyl mistakes the part of a friend when he becomes flatterer."

"There is no flattery in a plain unadorned truth," said he, hastily.

"And were it all as you say," rejoined she, speaking with a heightened colour and a flashing eye, "how could such circumstances be linked with those you spoke of?"

"Easily enough, if I did but dare to tell it," was his reply.

"It is too late for reserve; go on freely," said she, with a faint sigh.

Jekyl resumed,—

"Mr. Dalton knows—there are thousands could have told him so—that his daughter may be a Princess to-morrow if she wishes it. She has but to choose her rank and her nationality, and there is not a land in Europe in whose peerage she may not inscribe her name. It is too late for reserve," said he, quickly, "and consequently too late for resentment. You must not be angry with me now; I am but speaking in your presence what all the world says behind your back. Hearing this, and believing it, as all believe it, what is there more natural than that he should address himself to her at whose disposal lie all that wealth can compass? The sun bestows many a gleam of warmth and brightness before he reaches the zenith. Do not mistake me. This request was scarcely fair; it was ill-advised. Your freedom should never have been jeopardized for such a mere trifle. Had your father but seen with his own eyes your position here, he

would never have done this; but, being done, there is no harm in it."

"But what am I to do?" said Kate, trembling with embarrassment and vexation together.

"Send the money, of course," said he, coolly.

"But how—from what source?"

"Your own benevolence—none other," said he, as calmly. "There is no question of a favour; no stooping to an obligation necessary. You will simply give your promise to repay it at some future day, not specifying when; and I will find a banker but too happy to treat with you.'

"But what prospect have I of such ability to pay? what resources can I reckon upon?"

"You will be angry if I repeat, myself," said Jekyl, with deep humility.

"I am already angry with myself that I should have listened to your proposal so indulgently; my troubles must, indeed, have affected me deeply when I so far forgot myself."

Jekyl dropped his head forward on his breast, and looked a picture of sorrow; after a while he said,—

"Sir Stafford Onslow would, I well know, but be honoured by your asking him the slight favour; but I could not counsel you to do so. Your feelings would have to pay too severe a sacrifice, and hence I advise making it a mere business matter; depositing some ornament—a necklace you were tired of, a bracelet, anything—in fact, a nothing—and thus there is neither a difficulty nor a disclosure."

"I have scarcely anything," said Kate; "and what I have, have been all presents from Lady Hester."

"Morlache would be quite content with your word," said Jekyl, blandly.

"And if I should be unable to acquit the debt, will these few things I possess be sufficient to do it?"

"I should say double the amount, as a mere guess."

"Can I—dare I take your counsel?" cried she, in an accent of intense anxiety.

"Can you reject it, when refusal will be so bitter?"

Kate gave a slight shudder, as though that pang was greater than all the rest.

"There is fortunately no difficulty in the matter whatever," said Jekyl, speaking rapidly. "You will, of course, have many things to purchase before you leave this. Well; take the carriage and your maid, and drive to the Ponte Vecchio. The last shop on the right-hand side of the bridge is 'Morlache's.' It is unpromising enough outside, but there is wealth within to subsidize a kingdom. I will be in waiting to receive you, and in a few minutes the whole will be concluded; and if you have your letter ready, you can enclose the sum, and post it at once."

If there were many things in this arrangement which shocked Kate, and revolted against her sense of delicacy and propriety, there was one counterpoise more than enough to outweigh them all: she should be enabled to serve her father—she, who alone of all his children had never contributed, save by affection, to his comfort, should now materially assist him. She knew too well the sufferings and anxieties his straitened fortune cost him—she witnessed but too often the half-desperation in which he would pass days, borne down and almost broken-hearted! and she had witnessed that outbreak of joy he would indulge in when an unexpected help had suddenly lifted him from the depth of his poverty. To be the messenger of such good tidings—to be associated in his mind with this assistance—to win his fervent "God bless you!" she would have put life itself in peril, and when Jekyl placed so palpably before her the promptitude with which the act could be accomplished, all hesitation ceased, and she promised to be punctual at the appointed place by three o'clock that same afternoon.

"It is too early to expect to see Lady Hester," said Jekyl; "and indeed, my real business here this morning was with yourself, so that now I shall drive out to Midchekoff's and make all the arrangements about the villa. Till three, then, good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Kate, for the first time disposed to feel warmly to the little man, and half reproach herself with some of the prejudices she used to entertain regarding him.

Jekyl now took his way to the stables, and ordering a brougham to be got ready for him, sauntered into the house, and took his coffee while he waited.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RACCA MORLACHE.

THERE is something of mediæval look and air about the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, which gives it a peculiar interest to the traveller. The quaint little low shops on either side, all glittering with gold and gems—the gorgeous tiaras of diamonds—the richly-enamelled cups and vases aside of the grotesque ornaments of peasant costume—the cumbrous earrings of stamped gold—the old-fashioned clasps and buckles of massive make—the chains fashioned after long-forgotten models—the strings of Oriental pearls, costly and rare enough for queens to wear—are all thrown about in a rich profusion, curiously in contrast to the humble sheds—for they are little more —that hold them.

The incessant roll of equipages—the crowd and movement of a great city—the lingering peasant, gazing with rapturous eyes at the glittering wares—the dark Israelitish face that peers from within—the ever-flowing tide of population of every rank and age and country, giving a bustle and animation to the scene, so beautifully relieved by the view that opens on the centre of the bridge, and where, in a vacant space, the Arno is seen wending peacefully along, and scattering its circling eddies beneath the graceful arches of the "Santa Trinità:" that little glimpse of hill, and vineyard, and river, the cypress-clad heights of San Miniato, and the distant mountain of Vallombrosa, more beautiful far than all the gold Pactolus ever rolled, or all the gems that ever glittered on crown or coronet.

There was one stall at the end of the bridge, so humble-looking and so scantily provided, that no stranger was seen to linger beside it. A few coral ornaments for peasant wear, some stamped medals for pious use, and some

of those little silver tokens hung up by some devout hands as votive offerings at a holy shrine, were all that appeared, while, as if to confirm the impression of the scanty traffic that went on, the massive door was barred and bolted like the portal of a prison; an almost erased inscription, unrenewed for nigh half a century, told that this was the shop of "Racca Morlache."

There may have been much of exaggeration in the stories that went of the Jew's enormous wealth; doubtless many of the accounts were purely fabulous; but one fact is certain, that from that lowly roof went forth sums sufficient to maintain the credit of many a tottering state, or support the cost of warlike struggles to replace a dynasty. To him came the heads of despotic governments—the leaders of rebellious democracy—the Russian and the Circassian—the Carlist and the Cristino. To the proud champion of divine right, or the fearless promulgator of equality, to all he was accessible; solvency and his profit were requirments he could not dispense with; but, for the rest, in what channel of future good and evil his wealth was to flow, whether to maintain a throne, or sap its foundation—to uphold a faith, or to desecrate its altars—to liberate a people, or to bind their fetters more closely, were cares that sat lightly on his heart.

He might, with his vast means, have supported a style like royalty itself. There was no splendour nor magnificence he need have denied himself; nor, as the world goes, any society from which he should be debarred—gold is the picklock to the doors of palaces as of prisons; but he preferred this small and miserable habitation, which for above two centuries had never borne any other name than the "Casa Morlache."

Various reasons were given out for a choice so singular; among others, it was said that the Grand-Duke was accustomed to visit the Jew by means of a secret passage from the "Pitti," while some alleged that the secret frequenters of Morlache's abode all came by water, and that in the dark night, many a boat skimmed the Arno, and directed its course to the last arch of the Ponte Vecchio. With these rumours we have no concern, nor with Morlache himself have we more than a passing business.

When Kate Dalton had driven up to the door, she had all but determined to abandon her intention. The arguments which in the morning had taken her by surprise seemed now weak and futile, and she was shocked with herself for even the momentary yielding to Jekyl's counsels. Her only doubt was whether to drive on without further halt, or leave some short message, to the effect that she had called but could not delay there. This seemed the better and more courteous proceeding; and while she was yet speaking to the dark-eyed, hook-nosed boy who appeared at the door, Jekyl came up.

"Be quick, Miss Dalton! Don't lose an instant," said he. "Morlache is going to the palace, and we shall miss him."

"But I have changed my mind. I have resolved not to accept this assistance. It is better—far better that I should not."

"It is too late to think of that now," said he, interrupting, and speaking with some slight degree of irritation.

"How too late? What do you mean?"

"That I have already told Morlache the whole story, and obtained his promise for the loan."

"Oh, sir! why have you done this?" cried she, in a voice of anguish.

"I had your free permission for it, Miss Dalton. When we parted this morning, the matter was fully agreed on between us; but still, if you desire to retract, your secret is in safe keeping. Morlache never betrays a confidence."

"And he has heard my name!" cried she, in a broken, sobbing tone.

"Not for the first time, be assured. Even Crœsus looked up from his ingots to ask if it were 'la belle Dalton;' and when I said 'Yes,' 'That's enough,' replied he; 'would that all my moneys had so safe investment!' But stay; there is Purvis yonder. He is pretending to examine an eye-glass in that shop opposite, but I see well that he is there only *en vedette*."

"What shall I do?" exclaimed the poor girl, now torn by impulses and emotions the most opposite.

"One thing you must do at once," said Jekyl; "get out of the carriage and visit two or three of the shops,

as if in quest of some article of jewellery. His anxiety to learn the precise object of your search will soon draw him from his 'lair.'"

The decision of this counsel, almost like a command, so far imposed upon Kate that she at once descended, and took Jekyl's arm along the bridge. They had not gone many yards, when the short, little, shuffling step of Purvis was heard behind them. Lingering to gaze at some of the splendid objects exposed for sale, they at last reached a very splendid stall, where diamonds, pearls, and rubies lay in heaps of gorgeous profusion. And now Purvis had stationed himself exactly behind them, with his head most artistically adjusted to hear everything that passed between them.

Jekyl seemed to feel his presence as if by an instinct, and without even turning his eye from the glass case, said, in a voice of some disparagement,—

"All modern settings!—very lustrous—very brilliant, but not at all what we are looking for."

Kate made no reply; for, while she had scruples about abetting a mere scheme, she was not the less eager to be free of the presence of the "Great Inquisitor."

"That, perhaps," said Jekyl, pointing to a magnificent cross of brilliants, "would not go ill with the necklace, although the stones are smaller. Say something—anything," added he, in a lower tone; "the spell is working."

"That is very handsome," said Kate, pointing at a venture to an object before her.

"So it is," said Jekyl, quickly. "Let us see what value they place upon it. Oh, here is Mr. Purvis—how fortunate! perhaps in all Florence there is not one so conversant with all that concerns taste and elegance, and, as an old resident, happily exempt from all the arts and wiles played off upon our countrymen."

"How d'ye do—d'ye do?" cried Purvis, shaking hands with both. "You heard of the bl-bl-blunder I made last night about the Ar-Archduke?"

"Not a word of it," replied Jekyl.

"I told him he was a-a-a fool," cried Purvis, with a scream and a cackle that very constantly followed any confession of an impertience.

"Meno male!" exclaimed Jekyl. "Even princes ought to hear truth sometimes; but you can help us here. Mr. Purvis, do you see that châtelaine yonder, with a large emerald pendant; could you ascertain the price of it for Miss Dalton? They'll not attempt to be extortionate upon *you*, which they would, assuredly, if *she* entered the shop."

"To be sure; I'll do it with pl-pleasure. Who is it for?"

"That's a secret, Mr. Purvis; but *you* shall hear it afterwards."

"I guess al-ready," said Scroope, with a cunning leer. "You're going to be m-m-m-married, ain't you?"

"Mr. Purvis, Mr. Purvis, I must call you to order," said Jekyl, who saw that very little more would make the scene unendurable to Kate.

"I hope it's not an It-It-Italian fellow; for they're all as poor as Laza-Laza-Laza——"

"Yes, yes, of course; we know that: your discretion is invaluable," said Jekyl; "but pray step in, and ask this question for us."

"I'll tell who'll do better," said Purvis, who, once full of a theme, never paid any attention to what was said by others. "Midche-Midche-Midche-k-k-off! he owns half of——"

"Never mind what he owns, but remember that Miss Dalton is waiting all this time," said Jekyl, who very rarely so far lost command of his temper; and at last Purvis yielded, and entered the shop.

"Come now," said Jekyl to his companion; "it will take him full five minutes to say 'châtelaine,' and before that we shall be safely housed." And with these words he hurried her along, laughing, in spite of all her anxieties, at the absurdity of the adventure. "He'll see the carriage when he comes out," added he, "and so I'll tell the coachman to drive slowly on towards the Pitti." And thus, without asking her consent, he assumed the full guidance at once, and, ere she well knew how or why, she found herself within the dark and dusty precincts of Morlache's shop.

Jekyl never gave Kate much time for hesitation, but hurried her along through a narrow passage, from which a winding flight of stone steps led downwards to a considerable distance, and at last opened upon a neat little

chamber on the level of the Arno, the window opening on the stream, and only separated from it by a little terrace, covered with geraniums in full flower. There was a strange undulating motion that seemed communicated from the stream to the apartment, which Jekyl at once explained to his companion as a contrivance for elevating and depressing the chamber with the changes in the current of the river, otherwise the room must have been under water for a considerable portion of the year. While he descanted on the ingenuity of the mechanism, and pointed attention to the portraits along the walls—the Kings and Kaisers with whom Morlache had held moneyed relations—the minutes slipped on, and Jekyl's powers as a talker were called upon to speak against time, the fidgety nervousness of his manner, and the frequent glances he bestowed at the timepiece, showing how impatiently he longed for the Jew's arrival. To all Kate's scruples he opposed some plausible pretext, assuring her that, if she desired it, no mention should be made of the loan; that the visit might be as one of mere curiosity, to see some of those wonderful gems which had once graced the crowns of royalty; and that, in any case, the brief delay would disembarrass them on the score of Purvis, whose spirit of inquiry would have called him off in some other direction. At last, when now upwards of half an hour had elapsed, and no sound nor sight bore token of the Jew's coming, Jekyl resolved to go in search of him, and requesting Kate to wait patiently for a few minutes, he left the room.

At first, when she found herself alone, every noise startled and terrified her; the minutes, as she watched the clock seemed drawn out to hours; she listened with an aching anxiety for Jekyl's return, while, with a sorrowing heart, she reproached herself for ever having come there. To this state of almost feverish excitement succeeded a low and melancholy depression, in which the time passed without her consciousness; the half-dulled sounds of the city, the monotonous plash of the stream as it flowed past, the distant cries of the boatmen as they guided their swift barks down the strong current, aiding and increasing a feeling that was almost lethargic. Already the sun had sunk below the hills, and the tall palaces were throwing their

giant shadows across the river, the presage of approaching night, and still she sat there all alone. Jekyl had never returned, nor had any one descended the stairs since his departure. Twice had she shaken off the dreamy stupor that was over her, and tried to find the door of the chamber, but, concealed in the wainscoting, it defied her efforts; and now, worn out with anxiety, and disappointed, she sat down beside the window, gazing listlessly at the water, and wondering when and how her captivity was to end.

The lamps were now being lighted on the quays, and long columns of light streaked the dark river. Across these a black object was seen to glide, and as it passed, Kate could perceive it was a boat that advanced slowly against the current, and headed up the stream. As she watched it came nearer and nearer; and now she could hear distinctly the sound of voices talking in French. What, however, was her surprise when, instead of making for the centre arches of the bridge, the boat was vigorously impelled across the river, and its course directed towards the very place where she sat?

However painful her situation before, now it became downright agony. It was clear there were persons coming; in another moment she would be discovered, unable to explain by what course of events she had come there, and thus, exposed to every surmise and suspicion that chance or calumny might originate. In that brief but terrible moment what self-accusings, what reproaches of Jekyl crossed her mind; and yet all these were as nothing to the misery which coming events seemed full of. For a second or two she stood irresolute, and then, with something like an instinct of escape, she stepped out upon the little terrace that supported the flowers, and, trembling with fear, took her stand beneath the shadow of one of the great buttresses of the bridge. The frail and half-rotten timbers creaked and bent beneath her weight, and close under her feet rolled along the dark river, with a low and sullen sound like moaning. Meanwhile the boat came nearer, and slowly gliding along, was at last brought up at the window. Two figures passed into the chamber, and the boatmen, as if performing a long-accustomed task, rowed out a few lengths into the stream to wait.

From the window, which still remained open, a stream of light now issued, and Kate's quick hearing could detect the rustling sound of papers on the table.

"There they are," said a voice, the first accents of which she knew to belong to the Abbé D'Esmonde. "There they are, Signor Morlache. We have no concealments nor reserve with you. Examine them for yourself. You will find reports from nearly every part of the kingdom, some more, some less favourable in their bearings, but all agreeing in the main fact, that the cause is a great one, and the success all but certain."

"I have told you before," said the Jew, speaking in a thick, guttural utterance, "that *my* sympathies never lead me into expense. Every solvent cause is good, every bankrupt one the reverse, in my estimation."

"Even upon that ground I am ready to meet you. The committee——"

"Ay, who are the committee?" interrupted the Jew, hastily.

"The committee contains some of the first Catholic names of Ireland, men of landed fortune and great territorial influence, together with several of the higher clergy."

"The bishops?"

"The bishops almost to a man are with us in heart; but their peculiar position requires the most careful and delicate conduct. No turn of fortune must implicate *them*, or our cause is lost for ever."

"If your cause be all you say it is—if the nationality be so strong, and the energies so powerful as you describe—why not try the issue, as the Italians and the Hungarians are about to do?" said Morlache. "I can understand a loan for a defined and real object; the purchase of military stores and equipment, to provide arms and ammunition; and I can understand how the lender, too, could calculate his risk of profit or loss on the issue of the struggle; but here, you want half a million sterling, and for what?"

"To win a kingdom!" cried D'Esmonde, enthusiastically. "To bring back to the fold of the Church the long-lost sheep; and make Ireland, as she once was, the centre of holy zeal and piety!"

"I am not a pope, nor a cardinal—not even a monsignore," said Morlache, with a bitter laugh. "You must try other arguments with *me;* and once more I say, why not join that party who already are willing to risk their lives in the venture?"

"Have I not told you what and who they are who form this party?" said D'Esmonde, passionately. "Read those papers before you. Study the secret reports sent from nearly every parish in the kingdom. In some you will find the sworn depositions of men on their death-beds—the last words their lips have uttered on earth—all concurring to show that Ireland has no hope save in the Church. The men who now stir up the land to revolt are not devoid of courage or capacity. They are bold, and they are able, but they are infidel! They would call upon their countrymen in the name of past associations—the wrongs of bygone centuries; they would move the heart by appeals, touching enough, Heaven knows, to the galling sores of serfdom, but they will not light one fire upon the altar—they will not carry the only banner that should float in the van of an Irish army. Their bold denouncings may warn some, their poetry will, perhaps, move others; but their prose and verse, like themselves, will be forgotten in a few years, and, save a few grassy mounds in a village churchyard, or a prisoner's plaint sent over the sea from a land of banishment, nothing will remain of Ireland's patriots."

"England is too powerful for such assailants," said the Jew.

"Very true; but remember that the stout three-decker that never struck to an enemy has crumbled to ruin beneath the dry rot," said D'Esmonde, with a savage energy of manner. "Such is the case now. All is rot and corruption within her; pauperism at home, rebellion abroad. The nobles, more tolerant as the commonalty grows more ambitious; resources diminishing as taxation increases; disaffection everywhere, in the towns where they read, in the rural districts where they brood over their poverty; and lastly, but greatest of all, schism in the Church, a mutiny in that disorderly mass that was never yet disciplined to obedience. Are these the evidences of strength, or are they sure signs of coming ruin? Mark me," said

he, hurriedly, "I do not mean from all this that such puny revolt as we are now to see can shake powers like that of England. These men will have the same fate as Tone and Emmett, without the sympathy that followed them! They will fail, and fail egregiously; but it is exactly upon this failure that our hopes of success are based. Not a priest will join them. On the contrary, their scheme will be denounced from our altars; our flocks warned to stand aloof from their evil influence. Our bishops will be in close communication with the heads of the Government; all the little coquetries of confidence and frankness will be played off; and our loyalty—that's the phrase—our loyalty stand high in public esteem. The very jeers and insults of our enemies will give fresh lustre to our bright example, and our calm and dignified demeanour form the contrast to that rampant intolerance that assails us."

"But for all this classic dignity," said Morlache, sneeringly, "you need no money; such nobility of soul is, after all, the cheapest of luxuries."

"You are mistaken—mistaken egregiously," broke in D'Esmonde. "It is precisely at that moment that we shall require a strong friend behind us. The 'Press' is all-powerful in England. If it does not actually guide, it is the embodiment of public opinion, without which men would never clothe their sentiments in fitting phrase, or invest them with those short and pithy apophthegms that form the watchwords of party. Happily, if it be great it is venal; and although the price be a princely ransom, the bargain is worth the money. Fifty or a hundred thousand pounds, at that nick, would gain our cause. We shall need many advocates; some, in assumed self-gratulation over their own prescience, in supporting our claims in time past, and reiterating the worn assertion of our attachment to the throne and the constitution; others, to contrast our bearing with the obtrusive loyalty of Orangeism; and others, again, going further than either, to proclaim that, but for us, Ireland would have been lost to England; and had not our allegiance stood in the breach, the cause of rebellion would have triumphed."

"And is this character for loyalty worth so much money?" said the Jew, slowly.

"Not as a mere empty name—not as a vain boast," replied D'Esmonde, quickly; "but if the tree be stunted, its fruits are above price. Our martyrdom will not go unrewarded. The moment of peril over, the season of concessions will begin. How I once hated the word!—how I used to despise those who were satisfied with these crumbs from the table of the rich man, not knowing that the time would come when we should sit at the board ourselves. Concession!—the vocabulary has no one word I'd change for it—it is conquest, dominion, sovereignty, all together. By concession, we may be all we strive for, but never could wrest by force. Now, my good Signor Morlache, these slow and sententious English are a most impulsive people, and are often betrayed into the strangest excesses of forgiveness and forgetfulness; insomuch that I feel assured that nothing will be refused us, if we but play our game prudently."

"And what is the game?" said the Jew, with impatience; "for it seems to me that you are not about to strike for freedom, like the Hungarians or the Lombards. What, then, is the prize you strive for?"

"The Catholicism of Ireland, and then of England—the subjugation of the haughtiest rebel to the Faith—the only one whose disaffection menaces our Holy Church; for the Lutheranism of the German is scarce worth the name of enemy. England once Catholic, the world is our own!"

The enthusiasm of his manner and the excited tones of his round, full voice seemed to check the Jew, whose cold, sarcastic features were turned towards the priest with an expression of wonderment.

"Let us come back from all this speculation to matter of plain fact," said Morlache, after a long pause. "What securities are offered for the repayment of this sum?—for, although the theme be full of interest to you, to me it has but the character of a commercial enterprise."

"But it ought not," said D'Esmonde, passionately. "The downfall of the tyranny of England is *your* cause as much as *ours*. What Genoa and Venice were in times past, they may become again. The supremacy of the seas once wrested from that haughty power, the long-slumbering

energies of Southern Europe will awaken, the great trading communities of the Levant will resume their ancient place, and the rich argosies of the East once more will float over the waters of the tideless sea."

"Not in our time, abbé—not in our time," said the Jew, smiling.

"But are we only to build for ourselves?" said D'Esmonde. "Was it thus your own great forefathers raised the glorious Temple?"

The allusion called up but a cold sneer on the Israelite's dark countenance, and D'Esmonde knew better than to repeat a blow which showed itself to be powerless.

A tap at the door here broke in upon the colloquy, and Jekyl's voice was heard on the outside.

"Say you are engaged—that you cannot admit him," whispered D'Esmonde. "I do not wish that he should see me here."

"A thousand pardons, Morlache," said Jekyl, from without; "but when I followed you to the 'Pitti,' I left a young lady here—has she gone away, or is she still here?"

"I never saw her," said Morlache. "She must have left before I returned."

"Thanks—good-bye," said Jekyl; and his quick foot was heard ascending the stairs again.

"The night air grows chilly," said the abbé, as he arose and shut the window; and the boatmen, mistaking the sound for a summons to approach, pulled up to the spot.

With a sudden spring, Kate bounded into the boat, while yet some distance off, and hurriedly said, "To the stairs beside the Santa Trinitá."

The clink of money, as she took out her purse, made the brief command intelligible, and they shot down the stream with speed.

"Do not speak of me," said she, covering her face with her kerchief as she stepped from the boat; and a gold Napoleon enforced the caution.

It was now night, the lamps were all lighted, and the streets crowded by that bustling throng of population whose hours of business or pleasure commence when day has closed. A thin drizzling rain was falling, and the footway was wet and muddy. Dressed in the height of fashion

—all her attire suited to a carriage—Kate set out to walk homeward, with a heart sinking from terror. Many a time in her condition of poverty, with patched and threadbare cloak, had she travelled the dark road from Lichtenthal to Baden after nightfall, fearless and undismayed, no dread of danger nor of insult occurring to her happy spirit, the "Gute nacht" of some homeward-bound peasant the only sound that saluted her; but now, she was no longer in the secluded valley of the great Vaterland; her way led through the crowded thoroughfares of a great city, with all its crash, and noise, and movement.

If, in her wild confusion, she had no thought for each incident of the morning, her mind was full of "self-accusings." How explain to Lady Hester her long absence, and her return alone, and on foot? Her very maid, Nina, might arraign her conduct, and regard her with distrust and suspicion. How should she appear in Jekyl's eyes, who already knew her secret? and, lastly, what answer return to her poor father's letter—that letter which was the cause of all her misfortunes?

"I will tell him everything," said she to herself, as she went along. "I will detail the whole events of this morning, and he shall see that my failure has not come of lukewarmness. I will also strive to show him the nature of my position, and let him know the full extent of the sacrifice he would exact from me. If he persist, what then? Is it better to go back and share the poverty I cannot alleviate? But what alternative have I? Jekyl's flatteries are but fictions. Would I wish them to be otherwise? Alas! I cannot tell; I do not even know my own heart now! Oh, for one true-hearted friend to guide and counsel me!" She thought of George Onslow—rash, impetuous, and ardent; she thought of the priest, D'Esmonde—but the last scene in which he figured made her shrink with terror from the man of dark intrigues and secret wiles; she even thought of poor Hanserl, who, in all the simplicity of his nature, she wished to have that moment beside her. "But *he* would say, 'Go back—return to the humble home you quitted—put away all the glittering gauds that are clinging to and clasping your very heart. Take, once more, your lowly place at hearth and board,

and forget the bright dream of pleasure you have passed through.' But how forget it? Has it not become my hope, my very existence? How easy for those who have not tasted the intoxicating cup, to say, 'Be cool of heart and head!' Nor am I what I was. How then go back to be that which I have ceased to be? Would that I had never left it! Would that I could live again in the dream-land of the poets that we loved so well, and wander with dearest Nelly through those forest glades, peopled with the creations of Uhland, Tieck, and Chammisso! What a glorious world is theirs, and how unlike the real one!"

Thus lost in thoughts conflicting and jarring with each other—mingling the long past with the distant future—hoping and fearing—now seeking self-persuasion here; now controverting her own opinions there—she walked hurriedly on, unconscious of the time, the place, and even the rude glances bestowed upon her by many who gazed at her with an insolent admiration. What an armour is innocence! how proof against the venomed dart of malice! Kate never knew the ordeal through which she was passing. She neither saw the looks nor heard the comments of those that passed. If her mind ever turned from the throng of thoughts that oppressed it, it was when some momentary difficulty of the way recalled her to herself, for, as she escaped from the smaller streets, the crowd and crash increased, and she found herself borne along as in a strong current.

"Does this lead to the Piazza Annunziata?" asked she of a woman at a fruit-stall.

"Tell her, Giacomo," said the woman to a youth, who, with a water-melon in his hand, lay at full length on the pavement.

"*Per Baccho!* but she's handsome!" said he, holding up the paper lantern to gaze at her. And Kate hurried on in terror.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STREET RENCONTRE.

Lady Hester Onslow had passed a day of martyrdom. There was scarcely a single contrariety in the long catalogue of annoyances which had not fallen to her share. Her servants, habitually disciplined to perfection, had admitted every bore of her acquaintance, while, to the few she really wished to see, admittance had been denied. The rumour of an approaching departure had got wind through the servants, and the hall and the courtyard were crowded with creditors, duns, and begging impostors of every age, and class, and country. It seemed as if every one with a petition or a bill, an unsatisfied complaint or an unsettled balance, had given each other a general rendezvous that morning at the Mazzarini Palace.

It is well known how the most obsequious tradespeople grow peremptory when passports are signed, and post-horses are harnessed. The bland courteousness with which they receive "your ladyship's orders" undergoes a terrible change. Departure is the next thing to death. Another country sounds like another world. The deferential bashfulness that could not hint at the mention of money, now talks boldly of his debt. The solvent creditor, who said always "at your convenience," has suddenly a most pressing call "to make up a large sum by Saturday."

All the little cajoleries and coquetries, all the little seductions and temptations of trade, are given up. The invitations to buy are converted into suggestions for "cash payment." It is very provoking, and very disenchanting! From a liberal and generous patron, you suddenly discover yourself transformed into a dubious debtor. All the halo that has surrounded your taste is changed for a chill atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. The tradesfolk, whose respectful voices never rose above a whisper

in the hall, now grew clamorous in the antechamber; and more than once did they actually obtrude themselves in person within those charmed precincts inhabited by Lady Hester.

What had become of Miss Dalton?—where could she be all this while? Had not Mr. Jekyl called?—what was he about that he had not "arranged" with all these "tiresome creatures"? Was there no one who knew what to do? Was not Captain Onslow, even, to be found? It was quite impossible that these people could be telling the truth; the greater number, if not all of them, must have been paid already, for she had spent a world of money latterly—"somehow." Célestine was charged with a message to this effect, which had a result the very opposite to what it was intended; and now the noisy tongues and angry accents grew bolder and louder. Still none came to her rescue; and she was left alone to listen to the rebellious threatenings that murmured in the court-yard, or to read the ill-spelled impertinences of such as preferred to epistolize their complaints.

The visitors who found their way to the drawing-room had to pass through this motley and clamorous host; and, at each opening of the door, the sounds swelled loudly out.

More than once she bethought her of Sir Stafford; but shame opposed the resolution. His liberality, indeed, was boundless; and therein lay the whole difficulty. Were the matter one for discussion or angry remonstrance she could have adventured it without a dread. She could easily have brought herself to confront a struggle, but was quite unequal to an act of submission. Among the numerous visitors who now thronged the *salons*, Lord Norwood, who had just returned from his shooting excursion in the Maremma, was the only one with whom she had anything like intimacy.

"I am but a poor counsellor in such a case," said he, laughing. "I was never dunned in my life—personally, I mean—for I always take care not to be found; and as to written applications, I know a creditor's seal and superscription as well as though I had seen him affix them. The very post-mark is peculiar."

"This levity is very unfeeling at such a moment," said Lady Hester, angrily; "and when you see me so utterly deserted, too!"

"But where's Jekyl? He ought to know how to manage this!"

"He has never been here since morning. His conduct is inexcusable!"

"And George?"

"Out the whole day!"

"And the 'Dalton'? for she has rather a good head, if I don't mistake her."

"She took the carriage into town, and has not returned."

"By Jove! I'd write a line to Sir Stafford; I'd tell him that I was going for change of air, and all that sort of thing, to Como for a week or two, and that these people were so pestering, and pressing, and all that; that, in fact, you were worried to death about it; and finding that your means were so very limited——"

"But he has been most liberal. His generosity has been without bounds."

"So much the better; he'll come down all the readier now."

"I feel shame at such a course," said she, in a weak, faint voice.

"As I don't precisely know what that sensation is, I can't advise against it; but it must needs be a very powerful emotion, if it prevent you accepting money."

"Can you think of nothing else, Norwood?"

"To be sure I can—there are twenty ways to do the thing. Close the shutters, and send for Buccellini; be ill—dangerously ill—and leave this to-morrow, at daybreak; or give a ball, like Dashwood, and start when the company are at supper. You lose the spoons and forks, to be sure; but that can't be helped. You might try and bully them, too—though perhaps it's late for *that;* and lastly—and, I believe, best of all—raise a few hundreds, and pay them each something."

"But how or where raise the money?"

"Leave that to *me*, if it must be done. The great benefactor of mankind was the fellow that invented bills. The glorious philanthropist that first devised the bright

expedient of living by paper, when bullion failed, was a grand and original genius. How many a poor fellow might have been rescued from the Serpentine by a few words scrawled over a five-shilling stamp! What a turn to a man's whole earthly career has been often given, as his pen glided over the imaginative phrase, 'I promise to pay.'"

Lady Hester paid no attention to the viscount's moralizings. Shame—indignant shame, monopolized all her feelings.

"Well," said she, at last, "I believe it must be so. I cannot endure this any longer. Jekyl has behaved shamefully; and George I'll never forgive. They ought to have taken care of all this. And now, Norwood, to procure the money what is to be done?"

"Here's the patent treasury for pocket use—the 'Young Man's Best Companion," said he, taking out of a black morocco case three or four blank bill-stamps, together with a mass of acceptances of various kinds, the proceeds of various play debts, the majority of which he well knew to be valueless. "What amount will be sufficient—how much shall we draw for?" said he, seating himself, pen in hand, at the table.

"I cannot even guess," said she, trembling with embarrassment and confusion. "There are all these people's accounts and letters. I suppose they are all horrid cheats. I'm sure I never got half the things, and that the rest are already paid for. But no matter now; let us have done with them at any cost."

"'Morlandi, coachmaker'—pretty well for Signor Morlandi!" said Norwood—"eleven hundred scudi for repairs to carriages—for destroying your patent axles, and replacing English varnish by the lacquer of a tea-tray—something less than two hundred and fifty pounds!"

"He is an obliging creature," said Lady Hester, "and always punctual."

"In that case we'll deal generously with him. He shall have half his money, if he gives a receipt in full."

"'Legendre, coiffeur; eight thousand francs.' Pas mal, Monsieur Legendre!—kid gloves and perfumes, Madonna bands and Macassar oil, are costly things to deal in."

"That is really iniquitous," said Lady Hester. "I see every bouquet is put down at a hundred francs!"

"A conservatory, at that rate, is better property than a coal-mine. Shall we say one thousand francs for this honest coiffeur?"

"Impossible! He would scorn such an offer."

"Pardon me. I know these people somewhat better and longer than you do; and so far even from suffering in his estimation—if that were a matter of any consequence—you will rise in his good opinion. An Italian always despises a dupe, but entertains a sincere respect for all who detect knavery. I'll set him down for one thousand, to be increased to fifteen hundred if he'll tell me how to cut down his neighbour, Guercini."

"What of Guercini? How much is his claim?"

"A trifle under five thousand crowns."

"Nearly one thousand pounds!" exclaimed she.

"Say, rather, eleven hundred and upwards," said Norwood.

"It is incredible how little I've had from him; a few trifling rings and brooches; some insignificant alterations and new settings; one or two little presents to Kate; and, I really believe, nothing more."

"We are getting deeper and deeper," said Norwood, turning over the bills. "Contardo, the wine-merchant, and Frisani, table-decker, are both large claimants. If pine-apples were the daily food of the servants' hall, they could scarcely cut a more formidable figure in the reckoning—indeed, if the whole establishment did nothing but munch them during all their leisure hours, the score need not be greater. Do you know, Hester, that the rogueries of the continent are a far heavier infliction than the income-tax? and that the boasted economy of a foreign residence is sensibly diminished by the unfortunate fact that one honest tradesman is not to be found from Naples to the North Pole. They are Spartans in deceit, and only disgraced whenever the rascality is detected. Now, it is quite absurd to read such an item as this: 'Bonbons and dried fruits, three hundred and seventy crowns!' Why, if your guests were stuffed with *marrons glacés*, this would be an exaggeration."

"You are very tiresome, Norwood," said she, peevishly. "I don't want to be told that these people are all knaves; their character for honesty is no affair of mine; if it were, Buccellini could easily mesmerize any one of them and learn all his secrets. I only wish to get rid of them—it's very distressing to hear their dreadful voices, and see their more dreadful selves in the court beneath."

"The task is somewhat more difficult than I bargained for," said Norwood, thoughtfully. "I fancied a few 'hundreds' would suffice, but we must read 'thousands!' instead. In any case, I'll hold a conference with them, and see what can be done."

"Do so, then, and lose no time, for I see Midchekoff's chasseur below, and I'm sure the prince is coming."

Norwood gave her a look which made her suddenly become scarlet, and then left the room without speaking.

If he had not been himself a debtor with the greater number of those who waited below, few could have acquitted themselves more adroitly in such a mission. He was an adept in that clever game by which duns are foiled and tradesmen mollified; he knew every little menace and every flattery to apply to them, when to soothe and when to snub them. All these arts he was both ready and willing to exercise, were it not for the unpleasant difficulty that his own embarrassments rendered him a somewhat dubious ambassador. In fact, as he himself phrased it, "it was playing advocate with one leg in the dock."

He lingered a little, therefore, as he went; he stopped on the landing of the stairs to peep out on the tumultuous assemblage beneath, like a general surveying the enemy's line before the engagement; nor was he over-pleased to remark that little Purvis was bustling about among the crowd, note-book and pencil in hand, palpably taking evidence and storing up facts for future mention. As he was still looking, the great gate was thrown open with a crash, and a calèche, dirty and travel-stained, was whirled into the court by three steaming and panting posters. After a brief delay, a short, thick-set figure, enveloped in travelling gear, descended, and putting, as it seemed, a few questions as to the meaning of the assembled throng, entered the house.

Curious to learn who, what, and whence the new arrival came, Norwood hurried downstairs, but all that he could learn from the postilion was, that the stranger had posted from Genoa, using the greatest speed all the way, and never halting, save a few minutes for refreshment. The traveller was not accompanied by a servant, and his luggage bore neither name nor crest to give any clue as to his identity. That he was English, and that he had gone direct to Sir Stafford's apartments, was the whole sum of the viscount's knowledge; but even this seemed so worthy of remark, that he hastened back with the tidings to Lady Hester, instead of proceeding on his errand.

She treated the announcement with less interest. It might be Proctor—Sir Stafford's man. Was he tall, and black-whiskered? No, he was short; and, so far as Norwood saw, he thought him fair-haired. "She knew of nobody to bear that description. It might be an English physician from Genoa—there was one there, or in Nice, she forgot exactly which, who was celebrated for treating gout, or sore eyes—she could not remember precisely, but it was certainly one or the other. On recollection, however, it was probably gout, because he had attended Lord Hugmore, who was blind."

"In that case," said Norwood, "Onslow would seem to be worse."

"Yes, poor man—much worse. George sat up with him the night before last, and said he suffered terribly. His mind used to wander at intervals too, and he spoke as if he was very unhappy."

"Unhappy—a man with upwards of thirty thousand a year unhappy!" said Norwood, clasping his hands over his head as he spoke.

"You forget, my lord, that there are other considerations than moneyed ones which weigh at least with *some* persons; and if Onslow's fortune be a princely one, he may still feel compunctious regrets for his detestable conduct to *me!*"

"Oh, I forgot *that!*" said Norwood, with a most laudable air of seriousness.

"It was very kind of you, my lord—very considerate

and very kind indeed, to forget it. Yet I should have fancied it was the very sentiment uppermost in the mind of any one entering this chamber—witnessing the solitary seclusion of my daily life—beholding the resources by which the weary hours are beguiled—not to speak of the ravages which sorrow has left upon these features."

"On that score, at least, I can contradict you, Hester," said he, with a smile of flattering meaning. "It is now above eight years since first——"

"How can you be so tiresome?" said she, pettishly.

"Prince Midchekoff, my lady, presents his compliments," said a servant, "and wishes to know if your ladyship will receive him at dinner to-day, and at what hour?"

"How provoking! Yes—say, 'Yes, at eight o'clock,'" said she, walking up and down the room with impatience. "You'll stay and meet him, Norwood; I know you're not great friends; but no matter, George is so uncertain—he left us t'other day to entertain the prince alone—Kate and myself—only fancy; and as he takes half-hour fits of silence, and Kate occasionally won't speak for a whole evening together, my part was a pleasant one."

"How Florence wrongs you both!" said Norwood; "they say that no one is more agreeable to your ladyship than the Midchekoff," said he, slowly and pointedly.

"As Miss Dalton's admirer—I hope rumour adds that," said she, hastily.

"What? are you really serious? Has the Dalton pretensions?"

"Perhaps not; but the prince has," interrupted Lady Hester; "but you are forgetting these people all the while. Do pray do something—anything with them; and don't forget us at eight o'clock." And with this Lady Hester hurried from the room, as if admonished by her watch of the lateness of the hour, but really anxious to escape further interrogatory from the viscount.

When Norwood reached the court, he was surprised to find it empty—not one of the eager creditors remained, but all was still and silent.

"What has become of these good people?" asked he of the porter.

"The stranger who arrived in the calèche a while ago spoke a few words to them, and they went."

This was all that he knew, and being a porter—one of that privileged caste whose prerogative it is never to reveal what takes place before their eyes—his present communication was remarkable.

"Would that the good genius had remembered *me* in his moment of generous abandonment!" muttered Norwood, as he took his road homeward to dress for dinner.

Little scrupulous about the means of getting out of a difficulty, provided it were only successful, Norwood scarcely bestowed another thought upon the whole matter, and lounged along the streets as forgetful of the late scene as though it had passed twenty years before.

As the viscount strolled along towards his lodgings, Kate Dalton, with trembling limbs and palpitating heart, threaded her way through the thronged streets, now wet and slippery from a thin rain that was falling. So long as her road lay through the less-frequented thoroughfares, her appearance excited little or no attention in the passers-by; but when she entered the Piazza Santa Trinitá, all ablaze with gas-lamps and the reflected lights from brilliant shops, many stopped, turned, and gazed at the strange sight of a young and beautiful girl, attired in the very height of fashion, being alone and afoot at such an hour. Unaccountable even to mystery, as it seemed, there was something in her gait and carriage that at once repelled the possibility of a disparaging impression, and many touched or removed their hats respectfully as they made way for her to pass. To avoid the carriages, which whirled past in every direction and at tremendous speed, she passed close along by the houses, and, in doing so, came within that brilliant glare of light that poured from the glass doors of the great Café of the Piazza. It was exactly the hour when the idle loungers of Florence society—that listless class who form the staple of our club life in England—were swarming to talk of the plans of the evening, what resources of pleasure were available, and what receptions were open. The drizzling rain, and the cold, raw feeling of the air, prevented their being seated, as their custom was, before the doors, where in

every attitude of graceful languor they habitually smoked their cigars and discussed the passers-by, in all the plenitude of recreative indolence. The group consisted of men of every age and country.

There were princes, and blacklegs, and adventurers; some with real rank and fortune; others as destitute of character as of means. Many owned names great and renowned in history; others bore designations only chronicled in the records of criminal jurisprudence. All were well dressed, and, so far as cursory notice could detect, possessed the ease and bearing of men familiar with the habits of good society. Although mixing in very distinct circles, here, at least, they met every day on terms of familiar equality, discussing the politics of the hour and the events of the world with seeming frankness and candour.

From a small chamber at the back of the café a little tide of loungers seemed to ebb and flow, while the sharp rattling sound of a dice-box indicated the nature of the occupation that went forward there. The small apartment was thronged with spectators of the game, and even around the door several were standing, content to hear the tidings of a contest they could not witness.

"To sit upon the Ponte Carraja, and chuck rouleaux of gold into the Arno, would be to the full as amusing, and not a more costly pastime," said a sharp, ringing voice, which, once heard, there was no difficulty in recognizing as Haggerstone's.

"But Onslow plays well," said another.

"When he's in luck, sir," said the colonel. "Let him always have the winning horse to ride, and I don't say he'll lose the saddle; but Maraffi would win on a donkey."

"Is he a Russian?" asked one.

"No, sir, he's worse; he's a Greek. I know everything about him. His mother was a Finlander, and the father a Cephalonian. I don't think Satan himself would ask a better parentage."

"What luck! By Jove! I never saw such luck!" said a voice from within the door. "Onslow has no chance with him."

"Nor will you, sir, if you persist in expressing your

opinion in English," said Haggerstone. "Maraffi speaks every language, plays every game, and knows the use of every weapon, from a jereed to a Joe Manton."

"I'll not test his abilities at any of them," said the other, laughing.

"*Per Baccho!* there goes something new," said a young Italian, from the window that looked into the street. "Who's she?"

"*Diantre!*" said the old Duc de Parivaux. "That is something very exquisite indeed. She was splashed by that carriage that passed, and I just saw her foot."

"She's the prima donna from Milan."

"She's the Cipriani. I know her figure perfectly."

"She's very like the Princesse de Raoule."

"Taller, and younger."

"And fifty times handsomer. What eyes! By Jove! I wish the drosky would never move on! She is regularly imprisoned there."

"You are very ungallant, gentlemen, I must say," said the young Count de Guilmard, the French secretary of legation, who, having finished his coffee and liquor, coolly arranged his curls beneath his hat before the glass—"very ungallant indeed, not to offer an arm to an unprotected princess. We Frenchmen understand our *devoirs* differently." And, so saying, he passed out into the street, while the rest pressed up closer to the window to observe his proceedings.

"Cleverly done, Guilmard!" cried one. "See how he affects to have protected her from the pole of that carriage."

"She'll not notice him"—"She will"—"She has"—"She hasn't"—"She is moving his way!"—"Not at all"—"She's speaking!"—"There, I told you he'd succeed"—"But he hasn't, though." Amid all these phrases, which rattled on more rapidly than we can write them, Onslow joined the party, one heavy venture on a single card having involved him in a tremendous loss.

"Is that a countrywoman of yours, Onslow?" asked a young Russian noble. "If so, the *entente cordiale* with France seems scarcely so secure as statesmen tell us."

Onslow gave one glance through the window, and

dashed into the street with a bound like the spring of a wild animal. He threw himself between Guilmard and Kate. The Frenchman lifted his cane, and the same instant he fell backwards upon the pavement, rather hurled than struck down by the strong arm of the young Guardsman. Before the lookers-on could hasten out, George had hailed a carriage, and, assisting Kate in, took his seat beside her, and drove off.

So sudden was the whole incident, and so engrossing the terror of poor Kate's mind, that she saw nothing of what passed, and was merely conscious that by George's opportune coming she was rescued from the insolent attentions of the stranger.

"Did he speak to you? Did he dare to address you?" asked Onslow, in a voice which boiling passion rendered almost unintelligible.

"If he did, I know not," said she, as she covered her face with shame, and struggled against the emotion that almost choked her.

"He took your arm—he certainly laid hold of your hand!"

"It was all so rapid that I can tell nothing," said she, sobbing; "and although my courage never failed me till you came, *then* I thought I should have fainted."

"But how came you alone and on foot, and at such an hour, too? Where had you been?"

These questions he put with a sort of stern resolution that showed no evasive answer would rescue her.

"Did you leave home without a carriage, or even a servant?" asked he again, as no answer was returned to his former question.

"I did take a carriage in the morning; and—and——"

"Sent it away again," continued George, impetuously. "And where did you drive to—where pass the day?"

Kate hung her head in silence, while her heart felt as if it would burst from very agony.

"This is no idle curiosity of mine, Miss Dalton," said he, speaking with a slow and measured utterance. "The society you have mixed with here is not above any reproach, nor beneath any suspicion. I insist upon knowing where you have been, and with whom? So, then, you

refuse to speak—you will not tell. If it be Lady Hester's secret——"

"No, no! The secret is mine, and mine only. I swear to you, by all we both believe in, that it has no concern with any one save myself."

"And can you not confide it to me? Have I no right to ask for the confidence, Kate?" said he, with tenderness. "Know you any one more deeply and sincerely your friend than I am—more ready to aid, protect, or counsel you?"

"But this I cannot—must not tell you," said she, in accents broken by sobbing.

"Let me know, at least, enough to refute the insolence of an imputation upon your conduct. I cannot tamely sit by and hear the slanderous stories that to-morrow or next day will gain currency through the town."

"I cannot—I cannot," was all that she could utter.

"If not me, then, choose some other defender. Unprotected and undefended you must not be."

"I need none, sir; none will asperse me!" said she, haughtily.

"What! you say this? while scarce five minutes since I saw you outraged—insulted in the open street?"

A burst of tears, long repressed, here broke from Kate, and for some minutes her sobs alone were heard in the silence.

"I will ask but one question more, Miss Dalton," said George, slowly, as the carriage passed under the arched gateway of the Palace, "and then this incident is sealed to me for ever. Is this secret—whatever it be—in your own sole keeping; or is your confidence shared in by another?"

"It is," murmured Kate, below her breath.

"You mean that it is shared?" asked he, eagerly.

"Yes, Mr. Jekyl at least knows——"

"Jekyl!" cried George, passionately; "and is Alfred Jekyl your adviser and your confidant? Enough, you have told me quite enough," said he, dashing open the door of the carriage as it drew up to the house. He gave his hand to Kate to alight, and then, turning away, left her, without even a "good-bye," while Kate hurried to her room, her heart almost breaking with agony.

"I shall be late, Nina," said she, affecting an air and voice of unconcern, as she entered her room; "you must dress me rapidly."

"Mademoiselle must have been too pleasantly engaged to remember the hour," said the other, with an easy pertness quite different from her ordinary manner.

More struck by the tone than by the words themselves, Kate turned a look of surprise on the speaker.

"It is so easy to forget one's self at Morlache's, they say," added the girl, with a saucy smile; and although stung by the impertinence, Kate took no notice of the speech. "Mademoiselle will of course never wear that dress again," said Nina, as she contemptuously threw from her the mud-stained and rain-spotted dress she had worn that morning. "We have a Basque proverb, mademoiselle, about those who go out in a carriage, and come back on foot."

"Nina, what do you mean by these strange words and this still more strange manner?" asked Kate, with a haughtiness she had never before assumed towards the girl.

"I do not pretend to say that mademoiselle has not the right to choose her confidantes, but the Principessa de San Martello and the Duchessa di Rivoli did not think me beneath their notice."

"Nina, you are more unintelligible than ever," cried Kate, who still, through all the dark mystery of her words, saw the lowering storm of coming peril.

"I may speak too plainly, too bluntly, mademoiselle, but I can scarcely be reproached with equivocating; and I repeat that my former mistresses honoured me with their secret confidence; and they did wisely, too, for I should have discovered everything of myself, and my discretion would not have been fettered by a compact."

"But if I have no secrets," said Kate, drawing herself up with a proud disdain, "and if I have no need either of the counsels or the discretion of my waiting-woman?"

"In that case," said Nina, quietly, "mademoiselle has only perilled herself for nothing. The young lady who leaves her carriage and her maid to pass three hours at Morlache's, and returns thence, on foot, after nightfall,

may truly say she has no secrets—at least so far as the city of Florence is concerned."

"This is insolence that you never permitted yourself before," said Kate, passionately.

"And yet, if I were mademoiselle's friend instead of her servant, I should counsel her to bear it."

"But I will not," cried Kate, indignantly. "Lady Hester shall know of your conduct this very instant."

"One moment, mademoiselle—just one moment," said Nina, interposing herself between Kate and the door. "My tongue is oftentimes too ready, and I say things for which I am deeply sorry afterwards; forgive me, I beg and beseech you, if I have offended; reject my counsels, disdain my assistance, if you will, but do not endanger yourself in an instant of anger. If you have but little control over your temper, I have even less over mine; pass out of that door as my enemy, and I am yours to the last hour of my life."

There was a strange and almost incongruous mixture of feeling in the way she uttered these words; at one moment abject in submission, and at the next hurling a defiance as haughty as though she were an injured equal. The conflict of the girl's passion, which first flushed, now left her pale as death, and trembling in every limb. Her emotion bespoke the most intense feeling, and Kate stood like one spell-bound before her. Her anger had already passed away, and she looked with almost a sense of compassion at the excited features and heaving bosom of the Spanish girl.

"You wrong yourself and me too, Nina," said Kate Dalton, at last. "I have every trust in your fidelity, but I have no occasion to test it."

"Be it so, mademoiselle," replied the other, with a curtsey.

"Then all is forgotten," said Kate, affecting a gaiety she could not feel; "and now let me hasten downstairs, for I am already late."

"The prince will have thought it an hour, mademoiselle," said the girl; the quiet demureness of her manner depriving the words of any semblance of impertinence. If Kate looked gravely, perhaps some little secret source of pleasure lay hid within her heart, and in the glance she gave at her

glass, there was an air of conscious triumph that did not escape the lynx-eyed Nina.

"My lady is waiting dinner, Miss Dalton," said a servant, as he tapped at the door; and Kate, with many a trouble warring in her breast, hastened downstairs, in all the pride of a loveliness that never was more conspicuous.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PROPOSALS.

KATE found Lady Hester, the prince, and Mr. Jekyl awaiting her as she entered the drawing-room, all looking even more bored and out of sorts than people usually do who have been kept waiting for their dinner.

"Everybody has sworn to be as tiresome and disagreeable as possible to-day," said Lady Hester. "George said he'd dine here, and is not coming; Lord Norwood promised, and now writes me word that an unavoidable delay detains him; and here comes Miss Dalton—the mirror of punctuality when all else are late—a full half-hour after the time. There, dear—no excuses nor explanations about all you have been doing—the thousand calls you've made and shops you've ransacked. I'm certain you've had a miserable day of it."

Kate blushed deeply, and dreaded to meet Jekyl's eye; but, when she did, that little glassy orb was as blandly meaningless as any that ever rattled in the head of a Dutch doll. Even as he gave his arm to lead her in to dine, nothing in his manner or look betrayed anything like a secret understanding between them. A bystander might have deemed him a new acquaintance.

"Petits dîners" have, generally, the prerogative of

agreeability—they are the chosen reunions of a few intimates, who would not dilute their pleasantry even by a single bore. They are also the bright occasions for those little culinary triumphs which never can be attempted in a wider sphere. Epigrams, whether of lamb or language, require a select and special jury to try them; but just in the same proportion as the success of such small parties is greater, so is their utter failure when by any mischance there happens a break-down in the good spirits or good humour of the company.

We have said enough to show that the ladies, at least, might be excused for not displaying those thousand attractions of conversation which all centre on the one great quality—ease of mind. The prince was more than usual out of sorts, a number of irritating circumstances having occurred to him during the morning. A great sovereign—on whom he had lavished the most profuse attentions—had written him a letter of thanks, through his private secretary, enclosing a snuff-box, instead of sending him an autograph, and the first class of the national order. His glover, in Paris, had forgotten to make his right hand larger than the left, and a huge packet that had just arrived was consequently useless. His *chef* had eked out a salmi of ortolans by a thrush; and it was exactly that unlucky morsel the cardinal had helped himself to at breakfast, and immediately sent his plate away in disappointment. Rubion, too, his ninth secretary, had flatly refused to marry a little *danseuse* that had just come out in the ballet—a piece of insolence and rebellion on his part not to be tolerated; and when we add to these griefs an uncomfortable neckcloth, and the tidings of an insurrection in a Russian province where he owned immense property in mines, his state of irritability may be leniently considered.

Jekyl, if truth were told, had as many troubles of his own to confront as any of the rest. If the ocean he sailed in was not a great Atlantic—his bark was still but a cockle-shell—his course in life required consummate skill and cleverness, and yet never could be safe even with that. Notwithstanding all this, he alone was easy, natural, and agreeable—not as many an inferior artist

would have been agreeable, by any over-effort to compensate for the lack of co-operation in others, and thus make their silence and constraint but more palpable—his pleasantry was tinged with the tone of the company, and all his little smartnesses were rather insinuated than spoken. Quite satisfied if the prince listened, or Lady Hester smiled—more than rewarded when they once both laughed at one of his sallies—he rattled on about the court and the town talk, the little scandals of daily history, and the petty defections of those dear friends they nightly invited to their houses. While thus, as it were, devoting himself to the amusement of the others, his real occupation was an intense study of their thoughts, what was uppermost in their minds, and in what train their speculations were following. He had long suspected the prince of being attracted by Kate Dalton—now he was certain of it. Accustomed almost from childhood to be flattered on every hand, and to receive the blandest smiles of beauty everywhere, Midchekoff's native distrust armed him strongly against such seductions, and had Kate followed the path of others, and exerted herself to please him, her failure would have been certain. It was her actual indifference—her perfect carelessness on the subject—was the charm to his eyes, and he felt it quite a new and agreeable sensation not to be made love to.

Too proud of her own Dalton blood to feel any elevation by the marked notice of the great Russian, she merely accorded him so much of her favour as his personal agreeability seemed to warrant; perhaps no designed flattery could have been so successful! Another feeling, also, enhanced his admiration of her. It was a part of that barbaric instinct which seemed to sway all his actions, to desire the possession of whatever was *unique* in life. Those forms or fancies of which nature stamps but one, and breaks the die—these were a passion with him. To possess a bluer turquoise than any king or kaiser—to own an arab of some colour never seen before, —to have a picture by some artist who never painted but one; but whether it were a gem, a vase, a weapon, a diamond, or a dog, its value had but one test—that it had

none its exact equal. Now, Kate Dalton realized these conditions more than any one he had ever met. Her very beauty was peculiar; combining, with much of feminine softness and delicacy, a degree of determination and vigour of character, that to Midchekoff smacked of queenly domination. There was a species of *fierté* about her that distinguished her among other women. All that he had seen done by an illustrious title and a diamond tiara, she seemed capable of effecting in the simplest costume and without an effort. All these were wonderful attractions to his eyes; and if he did not fall in love, it was simply because he did not know how. He, however, did what to him served as substitute for the passion; he coveted an object which should form one of the greatest rarities of his collection, and the possession of which would give him another title to that envy—the most delicious tribute the world could render him.

There were some drawbacks to his admiration; her birth was not sufficiently illustrious; his own origin was too recent to make an alliance of this kind desirable, and he wished that she had been a princess—even "*de la main gauche*" of some royal house. Jekyl had done his best, by sundry allusions to Irish greatness, and the blood of various monarchs of Munster and Connaught, in times past; but the prince was incredulous as to Hibernian greatness; probably the remembrance of an Irish diamond, once offered him for sale, had tinged his mind with this sense of disparagement as to all Irish magnificence. Still Kate rose above every detracting influence, and he thought of the pride in which he should parade her through Europe as his own.

Had she been a barb or a bracelet, an antique cup or a Sèvres jar, he never would have hesitated about the acquisition. Marriage, however, was a more solemn engagement; and he did not quite fancy any purchase that cost more than mere money. Nothing but the possibility of losing her altogether could have overcome this cautious scruple; and Jekyl had artfully insinuated such a conjuncture. "George Onslow's attentions were," he said, "quite palpable; and although up to this Miss Dalton did not seem to give encouragement, who could

tell what time and daily intercourse might effect? There was Norwood, too, with the rank of peeress in his gift; there was no saying how an ambitious girl might be tainted by that bait." In fact, the prince had no time to lose; and, although nothing less accorded with his tastes than what imposed haste, he was obliged to bestir himself on this occasion.

If we have dwelt thus long upon the secret thoughts of the company, it is because their conversation was too broken and unconnected for recording. They talked little, and that little was discursive. An occasional allusion to some social topic—a chance mention of their approaching departure from Florence—some reference to Como and its scenery—formed the whole; and then, in spite of Jekyl, whose functions of "fly-wheel" could not keep the machine a-moving, long pauses would intervene, and each lapse into a silence, apparently more congenial than conversation. All this while Jekyl seemed to be reading the complex scheme of doubt, irresolution, and determination that filled Midchekoff's mind. The stealthy glances of the Russian's eyes towards Kate—the almost painful anxiety of his manner, to see if she noticed him while speaking—his watchful observance of her, in her every accent and gesture—told Jekyl the struggle that was then passing within him. He had seen each of these symptoms before, though in a less degree, when the coveted object was a horse or a picture, and he well knew how nothing but the dread of a competition for the prize would rouse him from this state of doubt and uncertainty.

The evening dragged slowly over, and it was now late, when Lord Norwood made his appearance. With a brief apology for not coming to dinner, he drew Jekyl to one side, and, slipping an arm within his, led him into an adjoining room.

"I say, Jekyl," whispered he, as they retired out of earshot of the others, "here's a pretty mess Onslow's got in. There has been a fracas in the street about Miss Dalton. How she came there at such a time, and alone, is another matter; and George has struck Guilmard—knocked him down, by Jove! and no mistake; and they're ot meet to-morrow morning. Of course, there was nothing

else for it; a blow has but one reparation—George will have to stand the fire of the first shot in Europe."

Jekyl hated a duel. Had he been a member of the Peace Congress, he could not have detested the arbitrament of arms more heartily. It involved partisanship, it severed intimacies, it barred general intercourse, and often closed up for a whole season the pleasantest houses of a town. The announcement of a strict blockade never struck a mercantile community with more terror. To Norwood the prospect was directly the opposite. Not only an adept in all the etiquette and ceremonial of such meetings, he liked to see his name circulated in these affairs as a kind of guarantee of his readiness to seek a similar reparation for injury. He had trusted for many a year on his dexterity at twelve paces, and he never missed an opportunity of sustaining the prestige of a "dead shot."

It was, then, with an ardour of amateurship that he narrated the various little preliminary steps which had already been taken. Merkheim, the Austrian secretary, had called on him, on the part of Guilmard; and as, in a case so clear, there was little to arrange, the only difficulty lay in the choice of weapons.

"The Frenchman claims the sword," said Norwood; "and it is always awkward to decline that proposition for a soldier. But I suppose George has about as much chance with one weapon as the other."

"You think he'll kill him, my lord?"

"I think so. If the offence had been less flagrant or less public, possibly not. But a blow! to be struck down in the open street! I don't see how he can do less."

"What a break-up it will cause here!" said Jekyl, with a nod of his head in the direction of the drawing-room.

"It will send them all back to England, I suppose."

"I suppose it will," added Jekyl, mournfully.

"What a bore! It's particularly unpleasant for me, for I hold some half-dozen of George's acceptances, not due yet; and, of course, the governor will never think of acquitting them."

"I conclude it is inevitable—the meeting, I mean?" said Jekyl.

"To be sure it is. Onslow took care of that! By the way, Jekyl, how came she there at such an hour, and alone, too?"

"She had been shopping, I fancy, and missed the carriage. There was some blunder, I have heard, about the coachman drawing up at the wrong door."

"No go, Master Jekyl. Don't try it on with me, old fellow. You know all about it, if you like to tell."

"I assure you, my lord, you give me a credit I don't deserve."

"You know the whole story from beginning to end, Jekyl. I'd back you against the field, my boy."

The other shook his head with an air of supreme innocence.

"Then George knows it?" added Norwood, half asserting, half asking the question.

"He may, my lord, for aught I can tell."

"If so, he's treating me unfairly," said Norwood, rising and pacing the room. "As his friend in this affair, there should be no reserve or concealment with me. You can surely say that much, Jekyl, eh? What a close fellow you are!"

"It is so easy not to blab when one has nothing to tell," said Jekyl, smiling.

"Come, there is something you *can* tell me. Where does that small corridor behind George's apartment lead to? There is a door at the end of it, and, I fancy, a stair beyond it."

"That, if I mistake not, leads up to Lady Hester—— No, I remember now; it leads to Miss Dalton's room."

"Just so; I could have sworn it."

"Why so, my lord?" asked Jekyl, whose curiosity was now excited to the utmost.

"That's *my* secret, Master Jekyl."

"But the door is always locked and bolted from within," said Jekyl, "and there is no keyhole on the outside."

"I'll not stand pumping, Jekyl. If you had been frank with *me*, perhaps I should have been as open with *you*."

For an instant Jekyl hesitated what course to follow.

It might be that Norwood really knew something of great importance. It might be that his discovery was valueless. And yet, if it concerned Kate in any way, the information would be all-important, his great game being to make her a princess, and yet preserve such an ascendency over her as would render her his own slave.

"She's a strange girl, that Dalton," said Norwood. "I wish she had about forty thousand pounds."

"She may have more than that yet, my lord," said Jekyl, dryly.

"How do you mean, Jekyl? Is there any truth in that story about the Irish property? Has she really a claim on the estate? Tell me all you know, old fellow, and I'll be on the square with you throughout."

Jekyl, who in his remark had darkly alluded to the prospect of Kate's marriage with Midchekoff, now saw that Norwood had totally misconceived his meaning, and, like a shrewd tactician, determined to profit by the blunder.

"Come, Jekyl, be frank and aboveboard. What *are* her prospects?"

"Better than I have told you, my lord," replied he, coolly. "If I cannot—for I am not at liberty to explain why—I am quite ready to pledge my word of honour to the truth of what I say, or, what your lordship will think more of, to back my opinion by a bet."

"By Jove! that *is* news!" said the viscount, leaning his head on the chimney to reflect. "You are such a slippery dog, Master Jekyl, you have so many turnings and windings in you, one is never quite sure with you; but supposing now, for argument's sake, that one thought of making this fair damsel a peeress, is there no hitch in the affair—no screw loose that one ought to look to?"

"In her birth, my lord?"

"No; d—n her birth! I mean about the tin."

"I believe, my lord, that I can save you all speculation on the subject when I say that pursuit would be hopeless there. The Midchekoff has gained the start, and must win in a canter."

"That Tartar fellow! nonsense, man; I know better than that. He'll never marry anything under royalty;

the fellow's mother was a serf, and he must wash that spot out of his blood whenever he can."

"You are mistaken, my lord. He only waits to be certain of being accepted, to offer himself."

"Refuse him!" said Norwood, laughing, "there's not that girl in Europe would refuse him. If every decoration he wore on his breast were a stripe of the knout upon his back, his wealth would cover all."

"The prince would give half his fortune to be assured of all you say, my lord," said Jekyl, gravely.

"By Jove! one might make a good thing of it, even that way," said Norwood, half aloud. "I say, Jekyl," added he, louder, "how much are you to have?—nay, nay, man, there's no impertinence in the question, we are both too much men of the world for that. It's quite clear that this is *your* scheme. Now, what's the damage?"

"My lord, you are as flattering to my abilities as unjust to my character."

"We'll suppose all that said," broke in Norwood, impatiently; "and now we come back to the original question—whether I cannot afford to be as liberal as the Russian. Only be explicit, and let us understand each other."

"My lord, I will not insult myself by believing I comprehend you," said Jekyl, calmly.

And before Norwood could detain him he left the room.

"Jekyl, come back, man! just hear me out—you've mistaken me! Confound the cur," muttered the viscount, "with his hypocritical affectation—as if I did not know his *mêtier* as well as I know my bootmaker's."

Norwood walked noiselessly to the door of the *salon* and peeped in. Lady Hester, the prince, and Jekyl were in earnest conversation in one quarter, while Kate sat apart, apparently engaged with her embroidery-frame, but, in reality, too deeply sunk in thought to notice the bright tints before her. Norwood entered listlessly, and strolling across the room, took a place beside her. She moved slightly as he drew forward his chair, and then, as she drew back her flounce, Norwood saw that it was of deep black lace. He coolly took out his pocket-book, wherein

he had deposited the torn fragment, and regarding it with attention, saw that it perfectly corresponded with the dress. So leisurely, and with such circumspection did he proceed, that several minutes elapsed before he looked up.

"You are meditative, my lord, to-night," said Kate, at last, making an effort to relieve an awkward situation; "what are you thinking of, pray?"

"Admiring your dress, Miss Dalton, which strikes me as singularly beautiful and becoming."

"Great praise this, from such an acknowledged judge as Lord Norwood," said she, smiling.

"I prefer it to antique lace, which in general is too heavy and cumbrous for my taste; I like these fine and delicate tissues, so frail and gossamer-like—not but their frailty, like all other frailty, incurs occasionally a heavy penalty; as here, for instance, you see this has been torn."

"So it has," said Kate, with confusion, "and I never noticed it. What a quick eye you must have, my lord!"

"And a sharp ear, too, Miss Dalton," said he, significantly; "in fact, I am one of those people whose every-day faculties do duty for what in others goes by the name of cleverness. It's a great pity," said he, looking down at the dress; "you see, Miss Dalton, what a false step can do."

"And yet I cannot remember when this occurred," said she, assuming to misunderstand his equivocal expression.

"Not recall it—not a clue to the mishap?" asked he, shrewdly.

"None," said she, blushing at the pertinacity with which he clung to the theme; "but it's of no consequence."

"Would Miss Dalton think it very singular if I should be able to assist her memory? Would she accept the service as kindly as it was proffered, too?"

"Really, my lord, you begin to speak in riddles," said she, more than ever piqued at his persistence.

"And yet," said he, following out the thread of his own thoughts, "I am assuredly as safe a counsellor as Albert Jekyl."

Kate grew deadly pale, but never replied to this speech.

"And certainly," resumed he, "the man who speaks in his own name should ever take precedence of an envoy."

"My lord," said she, firmly, "the very little which I can understand of your words implies a pretension to knowledge and influence over me which I disdain to accept; but still I cannot believe that you seriously mean to insult me."

"Of course not," said he; "I have come on a very different errand. If I did passingly allude to bygones, it was to show you that you can afford to be candid when I am frank. We two, united, would walk over the course, and no mistake—that's what I was coming to. I don't mean to say that the Russian is not richer—egad! there's no disputing that—still, as to rank, a peer of Great Britain, I take it, is the equal of any man. Not to remind you of the old adage about 'a bird in the hand'—I speak frankly, because you are your own mistress."

"Kate, if Lord Norwood will excuse you, come to me for one instant," cried Lady Hester.

"Just say yes, before you go—or, if not yes, tell me that I have ground for hope," whispered Norwood. But she arose without speaking.

"I'll not stand a 'hedge,' by Jove!" said Norwood, sulkily; "play or pay—nothing else for me."

"Allow me to pass you, my lord," said Kate, courteously.

"One word—off or on—Miss Dalton," said he, rising, and affecting to make way, while he still barred the passage. A proud, disdainful smile was all the reply she vouchsafed.

"All right," said he, insolently; "only remember how we stand, Miss Dalton, and whenever you want to repair the mischance of your lace flounce, don't forget the piece is in my keeping;" and he opened the pocket-book as he spoke, and exhibited the fragment before her. Sick with a terror she could neither explain nor realize, she lay back again in her chair, unable to move, while Norwood glided quietly away and left the room.

"Dear Kate, have you forgotten me all this time?" said Lady Hester, whom Kate now perceived was alone

on the sofa, Midchekoff and Jeykl having retired into an adjoining gallery, where they walked slowly along side by side, deep in conversation.

"You shouldn't have suffered Norwood to engross your attention in that manner, my dear. The prince has been quite put out by it, and at such a moment, too,—and how flushed you are. What has he been saying?"

"I can scarcely remember," said Kate, confusedly.

"Well, it's of no consequence, dear, because I have got something to tell you that would speedily make you forget it. You know, Kate, how I always prophesied wonderful things for you, just as I did before for poor Georgina Elderton, and she married a Rajah afterwards, and died Begum of something ending in 'Bad.' Indeed, I might say it ended in bad for herself, poor dear, for I believe she was poisoned. But, to come back, I always said that you also would have astonishing luck. I told Sir Stafford so. The first day I saw you, 'She'll be like Georgina,' I said. 'You'll see that girl in a wonderful position one of these days.' It is not that men care for their wives more than formerly—I rather fancy the reverse—but they have got a most intense passion just now for beauty. Wealth and good blood were once the only requisites, but they are both disregarded now, in comparison with good looks. I suppose the fashion won't last—it would be very absurd if it should—but, while it is the mode one ought to profit by it. Just as I am wearing all those horrid old brocades of my great grand-aunt's, with odious flowers of crimson and yellow, now that the taste in dress is 'rococo,' but of course in a year or two people will recover their senses again, and pretty girls without portions be left for subalterns in the line, as Providence intended they should. Don't you think so, dear?"

The brief question at the end of this long rambling speech would possibly have puzzled Kate to reply to, had not Lady Hester been far too much occupied in her own speculations to care for a rejoinder.

"You'll hear people talk a deal of nonsense about unequal marriages, and they'll quote Heaven knows what instances of girls, generally Irish ones, picking up princes and royal dukes, and all ending unhappily. Don't

believe a word of it, dearest; there's never misery where there's large fortune. The people who cry in velvet always shed rose-water tears, that don't hurt the skin or spoil the complexion. Not that I can say so of myself," added she, with a deep sigh; "but I am a creature apart. I fervently trust nature does not often form similar ones. Buccellini told me that I had a fifth pair of nerves—I assure you he did. It was a very shocking thing, and probably he ought never to have mentioned it to me; but it perfectly explains the excessive sensibility of my whole nature—doesn't it, dear?"

Kate smiled assent, and Lady Hester went on,—

"Then, as to religion, my dear, I'm afraid, indeed, we all think too little about it. I'm sure I'm quite shocked at what I see in society. It was only the other night Lady Grace Morton kept her seat when the cardinal was speaking to her. I apologized to him for it afterwards, and he said, with such a sweet smile, 'If these Protestants would only give us back our churches, we'd forgive their keeping their chairs.' The *mot* was very pretty, in French, and well turned—wasn't it? Of course, then, you'll make no obstacle about the Greek Church, which I believe is exactly like your own, only that the priest has a beard, which *I* think more becoming. It looks affectionate, too; it always gives one the idea of devotion, a girl changing her faith for her husband; and really, in this tiresome age we live in, a new religion is the only new thing one ever hears of. Your excellent family—that sweet sister, and the dear old papa—will probably make a fuss about it; but you know, after all, how absurd that is, and if you were to marry a Chinese, there's no saying what strange creatures you'd have to pray to. You'll have to go to Russia, but only for presentation; that over, the prince will obtain a renewal of his permission to reside abroad; still, if you have to pass a winter at St. Petersburg, it will be far from disagreeable. The women are too fond of caviare and high play; but they dress just as well as in Paris, and wear better diamonds. Midchekoff's jewels are unequalled; and, now that I think of it, there's one thing I've set my heart on, and you must positively promise to give me,—a little stiletto with an

emerald hilt and handle. I have pined for it—there's no other word—these three years. He wore it in London, and I have never had it out of my thoughts since. You can afford to be very generous, dearest. How I envy you that pleasure! and the delight you'll feel in providing for poor papa and Mary—no, Elizabeth, I mean—how absurd! I should say Ellen. It was something about that tale of Elizabeth, the Exile of Siberia, was running in my mind. The prince will do whatever you suggest, and, indeed, he has already hinted about your brother Frank joining the Russian service. He'll have him named an officer in the Emperor's Guard. You must insist, too, upon La Rocca being your own—settled upon yourself. They tell me it's the sweetest spot in the world; and I'll always live there when you don't want it. I mention this about the settlement, because there's no saying how men will behave. I'm sure I never could have anticipated such a return as I have met with from Sir Stafford. And then, you know, with a Russian, one cannot be too guarded. Don't you agree with me? Well, never mind, you'll perhaps come round to my opinion later. But here comes the prince, and it will be as well you should retire, dearest. I'll see you in your dressing-room, and tell you everything."

And with this assurance Kate retired, with a head and heart as full as ever young lady's felt.

Kate was hastening to her room, when a short, quick step behind her made her turn round, and she saw Purvis endeavouring to overtake her.

"Oh! I have you at last," said he, puffing for breath; "and what a ch-chase I've had for it! I've been in five rooms already, and nearly had a f-f-fight with that Frenchwoman of Lady Hester's. She's a regular T-T-Tartar, she is, and almost boxed my ears for looking into a small case where my lady's r-ringlets are kept—ha! ha! ha! I saw then, though—two long and two short, and a pl-pl-plait for the back of the head. How she m-m-makes up at night!"

"I must say that you have the strangest mode of requiting hospitality," said Kate, haughtily.

"It's all very well to talk of hospi-hospi-hospi——" Here a fit of gaping brought on coughing, which, after a

violent struggle, ended in the forced utterance of the last syllable of the word, but with such fatigue and exhaustion that he seemed scarcely able to continue; at last, however, he did resume. "It's all very well to talk of that, but we got in here by our own cl-cl-cleverness; at least by Zoe's."

"Less good-natured persons would find another word for it, Mr. Purvis."

"So they would. Haggerstone called it a Ricketty stratagem. No matter; *we*'re in—ha! ha! ha!—and *he*'s out. The pr-pr-proof of the pu-pu-pudding——"

"Will you excuse me, sir, if I say I must leave you?"

"Don't go, don't go; I've something very important to—to tell you. And first, Zoe—my sister Zoe—wants to see you. The cook has been most im-im-impertinent to her. She says it was ginger she put in the maca-maca-roni, instead of P-P-Parmesan; all his truffles are only Piedmontese. That isn't all: don't be in such a h-hurry. They've changed the wine, too. We had Ch-Ch-Chambertin yesterday, and they've given us P-Pomard to-day. How is that to be borne?"

"I really see but one remedy for it, sir," said Kate, scornfully.

"So Zoe said; that's exactly her opinion. They must be sent away. Zoe knows a very ti-ti-tidy cook. He's not a—a—top-sawyer, you know, but he can r-roast a bit of beef, and make a c-capital rice-pudding, and he'll come for six dollars a month. Wouldn't that be a sa-saving? Zoe told him to c-call to-day, and speak to La-Lady Hester."

"He will find that difficult, sir," said Kate, dryly.

"And as for the b-butler, such a j-j-jackanapes I never saw; and Zoe would advise you to take little Pierretto—the fellow you see every day at the Pergola; he sells the tickets outside the door. He looks r-r-ragged enough now, but when he's dressed——"

"You must see, sir," interposed Kate, "that these are all details in which it would be both indelicate and impertinent for me to intrude an opinion about."

"Not when you li-live in the house; not when you're dome-dome-domesticated with the family. We're all in

the same bo-boat now; and Zoe says somebody must steer it. Now Lizetta, Zoe's maid, would keep the k-keys herself."

"Pray remember, sir, this is Lady Hester Onslow's house."

"Egad! it w-won't be long so, if she goes on as she's d-doing. Martha saw the meat-cart come in this morning, and I had a p-p-peep into the servants' hall when the fl-flunkeys were feeding, and such w-w-waste, such re-reckless——"

"Good evening, Mr. Purvis; I cannot stay longer," said Kate. And, before he could interpose a word, she hastened from the spot, and, passing rapidly up the stairs, gained her own room, leaving Purvis to bethink him over the mass of things he had not touched upon, and on which he had mainly intended to debate.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN ARRIVAL.

Let us go back a few hours in our history, and follow the short and burly figure which, emerging from the travelling-carriage in the courtyard of the palace, pushed his way through the noisy throng of duns, and entered the house.

"How are you, Proctor—how is your master?" said he, as he threw off his great-coat, and unrolled a capacious muffler from his throat. "How is Sir Stafford?"

"Oh, Doctor Grounsell, glad you've come, sir. It will be a real pleasure to my master to see you again, sir."

"How is he, man—how's the gout?"

"Poorly—very poorly, sir. Things have gone badly here, doctor, since you left us," said he, with a sigh.

"Yes, yes; I know it all; I have heard all about that. But his health—tell me of his health."

"Greatly broken, sir. No sleep o' nights without opium, and no real rest even with that."

"And his spirits?"

"Broken too, sir. He's not what you remember him, sir, nor anything like it. No pleasant joke, sir, when anything goes amiss, as it used to be; no turning it off with a merry laugh! He's fretful and impatient about the merest trifles, and he that never wanted attendance is now always complaining that he's neglected, and deserted and forsaken by all the world."

"Does the captain come often to see and sit with him?"

"Every day, sir; but these visits do rather harm than good. Sir Stafford is vexed at what goes on in the house; and Master George—I don't know how it is—but he don't calm him down, and they have oftentimes angry words together; not but my master is frequently in the wrong,

and taxes the young gentleman with what he can't help; for you see, sir, my lady——"

"D—n——! I mean, tell me about Sir Stafford; it is of him I want to hear. Does he read?"

"He makes me read to him every day, sir, all about the money-market and railroad shares; sometimes twice over, indeed; and when I ask if he wouldn't like to hear about what goes on in politics, he always says, 'No, Proctor, let's have the City article again.'"

"And his letters—doesn't he read them?"

"The captain reads them for him, sir; and now and then writes the answers, for he can't hold a pen himself! Oh, you'll not know him when you see him! He that was so large and fine a man, I lift him in and out of bed as if he were a baby."

"Has he no acquaintance here?"

"None, sir."

"Are there no inquiries after his health?"

"Yes, sir; there's plenty of people he used to give money to when he was up and about—poor actors, and painters, and the like—they come every day to know how he is. Some of them leave begging letters, which I never give him; but most go away without a word."

"And his countrymen here—are there none who ask after him?"

"No, sir. The only English we ever see visit my lady, and never come to this side of the house at all."

"Does Miss Dalton come to inquire for him?"

"Every morning and every night too, sir. I suppose it must be without my lady's orders, or even knowledge; for once, when Sir Stafford was sitting up in his dressing-room, and I asked her if she wouldn't like to come in and sit a few minutes with him, she turned away without speaking; and I saw, from her manner, that she was crying."

"What are all these people outside—who are they?"

"My lady's tradespeople, sir. They've heard she's going for a few weeks to Como, and they've come with all their bills, as if she was a runaway."

"Go and tell them to leave this—send them away, Proctor. It would do your master great injury were he to

overhear them. Say that everything shall be paid in a day or two; that Sir Stafford remains here, and is responsible for all."

Proctor hastened out on his errand, and the doctor sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Poor Stafford! is all your trustful affection come to this? Is it thus that your unbounded generosity, your noble hospitality, are requited?"

When Proctor returned, he proceeded to detail, for the doctor's information, the various events which had occurred during his absence. With most, Grounsell was already acquainted, and listened to the particulars without surprise or emotion.

"So it is—so it is," muttered he to himself; "there may be more cant of virtue, a greater share of hypocrisy in our English morals, but, assuredly, these things do not happen with us as we see them here. There would seem a something enervating in the very air of the land, that a man like him should have sunk down into this besotted apathy! When can I see him, Proctor?"

He's dozing just now, sir; but about midnight he wakes up and asks for his draught. If that won't be too late for you——"

"Too late for me! Why, what else have I travelled for, night and day, without intermission? Be cautious, however, about how you announce me. Perhaps it would be better I should see the captain first."

"You'll scarcely find him at home, sir, at this hour; he generally comes in between three and four."

"Show me to his room. I'll write a few lines for him in case we don't meet."

Proctor accompanied the doctor across the courtyard, and, guiding him up a small stair, reached the terrace off which George Onslow's apartment opened. The window-shutters of the room were not closed, nor the curtains drawn; and in the bright light of several candles that shone within, Grounsell saw two figures seated at a table, and busily engaged in examining the details of a case of pistols which lay before them.

"That will do, Proctor," said Grounsell; "you may leave me now. I'll be with you at twelve." And thus

saying, he gently pushed him towards the door of the terrace, which he closed and bolted after him, and then noiselessly returned to his former place.

There were few things less congenial to Grounsell's nature than playing the spy. It was a part he thoroughly detested, nor did he think that it admitted of defence or palliation; still, the whole habit of his mind through life had impressed him with a disparaging opinion of himself. The limited sphere of his duties, the humble routine of his daily walk, and the very few friendships he had inspired, all tended to increase this impression, till at last he looked upon himself as one who could only be useful by the sacrifice of personal feeling and the abnegation of all self-esteem; and thus he would have declined to know another man for what he deemed of no consequence in himself. His fault was not thinking too well of others, but thinking too meanly of himself.

The scene before him now was enough to suggest deep anxiety. Notes and letters littered the floor and the table; the embers of a large fire of papers lay on the hearth; open drawers and boxes stood on every side; all betokening preparation, the object of which the pistol-case sufficiently indicated. As they sat with their backs to the window, Grounsell could not recognize the figures; but the voice of one proclaimed him to be George Onslow.

"And where is this place—on the way to Arezzo?" asked he.

"No; on the opposite side of the city, off the high road to Bologna. It is a little park, surrounding a summer palace of the Grand Duke, they call Pratolino," said the other. "They all agree that it is the best spot to be found; no molestation, nor interference of any kind; and a capital breakfast of fresh trout to be had at the inn."

"An interesting consideration for such as have good appetites," said Onslow, laughing.

"I never saw a Frenchman who had not, on such an occasion," rejoined the other, snapping the pistol as he spoke. "I like these straight stocks; you are almost always certain of your man, with a stiff arm and a low aim."

"I don't know that I've forgotten anything, Norwood,"

said Onslow, rising and pacing the room with folded arms.

"You've written to the governor?"

"Yes; and mentioned those acceptances," said Onslow, with a sneering severity that the other never seemed to notice. "You're quite safe, whatever happens."

"Hang it, man, I wasn't thinking of that; curse the money, it never entered my thoughts."

"My father will pay it," said George, dryly, and continued his walk.

"As you have alluded to it, I hope you spoke of it as a loan—anything like a play transaction suggests a mess of scandal and stories."

"I have called it a debt, and that is quite sufficient."

"All right—whatever you like. And now about this girl. Do you intend to let this mystery continue, or do you think that, under the circumstances, Lady Hester should still retain her as a friend and companion?"

"I know of nothing to her disparagement, nor have I yet met one who does. That there are circumstances which she does not deem fitting to entrust to my keeping is no just cause of allegation against her."

"You are very honourable to say so, George; but I must confess it is more than she deserves at your hands."

"How do you mean?"

"That she means to take the Russian, that's all."

"Well, and why not? Would not such a match be a brilliant one for a girl of much higher rank and pretension?"

"What's the use of all this fencing, man?" said Norwood, half angrily. "*I* know better how matters stand. Do you remember the night you lost so heavily at Macao? Well, I was lying stretched on the sofa, yonder, by the light of the fire only, when the door opened, and she stepped gently in."

"What, Kate Dalton?"

"Yes, Kate Dalton. Oh! impossible, if you like—deny it as much as you please, but *she* has not equal hardihood, that I can tell you; and if she had, here is the proof that could condemn her—this fragment of her lace flounce was caught in the door as she banged it in her escape;

and this very evening I compared it with the dress in question; ay, and showed her the rent from which it came."

Twice did George compel Norwood to repeat over this story; and then sat down, overwhelmed with sorrow and shame.

"You swear to me, then, Onslow, that you never saw her here—never knew of her coming?" said he, after a long silence between them.

"Never, I swear!" said the other, solemnly.

"Then, some other is the fortunate man, that's all. How good if it should turn out to be Jekyl!" And he laughed heartily at the absurdity of the conceit.

"No more of this," said Onslow, passionately. "The tone of the society we live in here would seem to warrant any, or every imputation, even on those whose lives are spotless; and I know of no greater degradation than the facility of our belief in them. In this instance, however, my conscience is at ease; and I reject, with contempt, the possibility of a stain upon that girl's honour."

"The sentiment does more credit to your chivalry than your shrewdness, George," said the viscount, sarcastically. "But as you are about to stake your life on the issue, I cannot impugn your sincerity."

A hasty movement of George towards the window here alarmed Grounsell, and he noiselessly withdrew, and descended the stairs again.

"A precious mess of trouble do I find ready for me," muttered he, as he passed across the courtyard. "Debt, duelling, and sickness—such are the pleasures that welcome me; and these not the worst, perhaps, if the causes of them were to be made known!"

"My lady has just heard of your arrival, doctor, and begs you will have the kindness to step up to her room," said Proctor, coming to meet him.

"I'm tired—I'm fatigued. Say I'm in bed," said Grounsell, angrily.

"Her maid has just seen you, sir," suggested Proctor, mildly.

"No matter; give the answer I tell you; or, stay—perhaps it would be better to see her. Yes, Proctor, show

me the way." And muttering to himself, "The meeting will not be a whit pleasanter for *her* than *me*," he followed the servant up the stairs.

Well habituated to Lady Hester's extravagant and costly tastes, Grounsell was yet unprepared for the gorgeous decorations and splendid ornaments of the chambers through which he passed, and he stopped from time to time in amazement to contemplate a magnificence which was probably rather heightened than diminished by the uncertain light of the candles the servant carried. He peered at the china vases; he passed his hand across the malachite and jasper tables; he narrowly inspected the rich mosaics, as though doubtful of their being genuine; and then, with a deep sigh—almost deep enough to be a groan—he moved on in sadness. A bust of Kate Dalton, the work of a great sculptor, and an admirable likeness, caught his eye, and he gazed at it with signs of strong emotion. There was much beauty in it, and of a character all her own; but still the cold marble had caught up, in traits sterner than those of life, the ambitious bearing of the head, and the proud elevation of the brow.

"And she has become this already!" said he, half aloud. "Oh, how unlike poor Nelly's model!—how different from the simple and beauteous innocence of those saint-like features!"

"My lady will see you, sir," said Célestine, breaking in upon his musings. And he followed her into the chamber, where, seated in a deeply-cushioned chair, Lady Hester reclined, dressed in all the perfection of an elegant *déshabillé*.

Grounsell was, assuredly, not the man to be most taken by such attractions, yet he could not remain entirely insensible to them; and he felt a most awkward sense of admiration as he surveyed her. With all a woman's quickness, her ladyship saw the effect she had produced, and languidly extending her hand, she vouchsafed the nearest approach to a smile with which she had ever favoured him. As if suddenly recalling all his old antipathies and prejudices, Grounsell was himself in a moment, and, scarcely touching the taper and jewelled fingers, he bowed ceremoniously, and took his seat at a little distance off.

"This is a very unexpected pleasure indeed," sighed Lady Hester; "you only arrived to-night?"

"Half an hour ago, madam; and but for your ladyship's summons I should have been in bed."

"How do you find Sir Stafford looking—poorly, I fear?"

"I haven't yet seen him, madam, but I am prepared for a great change."

"I fear so," sighed she, plaintively; "George says, quite a break up; and Buccellini calls it 'Gotta Affievolita,' and says it is very fatal with elderly people."

"The vulgar phrase of a 'broken heart' is more expressive, madam, and perhaps quite as pathological."

Lady Hester drew proudly up, and seemed preparing herself for a coming encounter. They were old antagonists, and well knew each other's mode of attack. On the present occasion, however, Grounsell did not seek a contest, and was satisfied by a single shot at the enemy, as it trying the range of his gun.

"You will probably advise a change of air and scene, Doctor Grounsell," said she, calmly, and as though inviting pacific intercourse.

"It is precisely what I have come for, madam," answered he, in a short, dry voice. "Sir Stafford's affairs require his immediate return to England. The vicissitudes that attend on great commercial enterprises threaten him with large—very large losses."

Lady Hester fell back in her chair, and this time, at least, her pale cheek and her powerless attitude were not feigned nor counterfeited; but Grounsell merely handed her a smelling-bottle from the table, and went on:—

"The exact extent of his liabilities cannot be ascertained at once, but they must be considerable. He will be fortunate if there remain to him one-fourth of his property."

Lady Hester's head fell heavily back, and she fainted away.

The doctor rose, and sprinkled her forehead with water, and then patiently sat down with his finger on her wrist to watch the returning tide of circulation. Assured at length of her restored consciousness, he went on:—

"A small establishment, strict economy, a watchful

supervision of every domestic arrangement, together with the proceeds of the sale of all the useless trumpery by which he is at present surrounded, will do much; but he must be seconded, madam—seconded and aided, not thwarted and opposed. George can exchange into a regiment in India; the proper steps have been already taken for that purpose."

"Have you been thoughtful enough, sir, in your general care of this family, to engage a small house for us at Brighton?"

"I have seen one at Ramsgate, madam," replied he, dryly; "but the rent is more than we ought to give."

"Are *we* so very poor as that, sir?" said she, sarcastically, laying emphasis on the pronoun.

"Many excellent and worthy persons, madam, contrive to live respectably on less."

"Is Miss Onslow to go out as a governess, doctor? I am afraid you have forgotten her share in these transactions?"

"I have a letter from her in my pocket, madam, which would show that she herself is not guilty of this forgetfulness, wherein she makes the very proposition you allude to."

"And *me?* Have you no sphere of self-denial and duty—have you no degrading station, nor menial servitude, adapted to *my* habits?"

"I know of none, madam," said Grounsell, sternly. "Varnish will no more make a picture than fine manners prove a substitute for skill or industry."

"This is really too much, sir," said she, rising, her face now crimson with anger; "and even if all you have said prove true, reverse of fortune can bring no heavier infliction than the prospect of *your* intimacy and obtrusive counsels."

"You may not need them, madam. In adversity," said Grounsell, with a smile, "healthy stomachs get on very well without bitters." And so saying, he bowed and left the room.

For a few moments Lady Hester sat overwhelmed by the tidings she had just heard, and then, suddenly rising, she rang the bell for her maid.

"Send Miss Dalton to me, Célestine; say I wish to

speak to her immediately," said she. "This may be the last time we shall speak to each other ere we invert our positions," muttered she to herself. And in the working of her features might be read all the agony of the reflection.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PRATOLINO.

How like the great world is every little section of it! How full of all its passions and interests, its warring jealousies and its selfish struggles! Within the Mazzarini Palace that night were at work every emotion and sentiment which sway the wide communities of men; and hope and fear, the yearnings of ambition, and the gloomy forebodings of despair, sat beside the pillows of those who, in vain, sought sleep and forgetfulness!

Before that long night ended, Sir Stafford had learned his ruin—for it was little less. Kate had yielded, to the pressing entreaties of Lady Hester, her consent to accept Midchekoff; and, just as day was breaking, George Onslow stole to his father's bedside to see him once more, perhaps for the last time! It would be difficult to say in which of those three hearts the darkest sorrow brooded! With noiseless step and cautious gesture, George crossed the little sitting-room, and entered his father's chamber; and, without awaking the servant, who kept watch habitually without, but now had dropped off to sleep, he gained the bedside, and sat down.

The terrible tidings he had just heard were evidently working on Sir Stafford's brain, and, despite all the influence of his opiate, still engaged his faculties; for his

lips continued to move rapidly, and short broken sentences fell from him incessantly. "Poor George! poor George!" he muttered from time to time, and the tears rolled down the young man's cheek as he heard them.

"How unworthy of him have I been!" thought he; "how shamefully unworthy and forgetful! Here should have been my place, for those hours which I have spent in noisy dissipation and debauch; and now I come for the first time, and probably the last! Oh, my poor father! How will you bear up against the shock that is preparing for you? for, with all my faults, I know how you have loved me!" A heavy tear dropped from him on the old man's cheek as he said this, and gently brushing it off with his hand, Sir Stafford opened his eyes and awoke. A mild and gentle smile broke over his features as he saw his son beside him, and he drew him towards him, and kissed him.

"Have you been long here, George?" said he, affectionately.

"But a few minutes. I am so sorry to have disturbed you," muttered the other, in confusion.

"Have you seen Grounsell yet? Has he told you?" asked Sir Stafford.

"Grounsell?—no, sir. I did not even hear of his arrival. What are his tidings?"

"The saddest, perhaps, one friend can bring another," sighed Onslow, as he covered his eyes with his hand. "Nay, nay—I am wrong," said he, rapidly. "So long as Sydney and yourself are spared to me, I have no right to say this; still, George, it is a terrible blow that strikes a man down from affluence to poverty, and, in place of wealth and power, leaves him nothing but insignificance and ruin!"

"Good heavens, father! is your brain wandering? What fancies are these that are flitting across your mind?"

"Sad and stern truths, my poor boy," replied the old man, grasping his son's hand in his fevered palm. "A few weeks more will see the great house of Onslow bankrupt. These things cannot be told too briefly, George," said he, speaking with a tremulous and eager rapidity. "One should hear misfortune early, to gain

more time for future measures. A great crash has fallen upon the moneyed interest of England. The vast speculations in railways have overreached themselves; failures of great houses abroad have added to the difficulty. The correspondents whose solvency we never doubted are tottering to ruin. Every post brings tidings of some new failure; and from Odessa, from Hamburg, and from the ports of the Baltic to the distant shores of the New World, there is nothing but bankruptcy."

"But you have large estates, sir; you possess property of various kinds beyond the reach of these casualties."

"I own nothing to which my creditors have not a just right, nor, if I did, could I exercise the privilege of retaining it, George," said the old man. "From what Grounsell tells me, there will be sufficient to meet every claim, but no more. There will remain nothing after! Lady Hester's settlement will, of course, secure to her a moderate competence; and we—you and I—must look about, and see how we can face this same world we have been feasting so long. My time in it will needs be brief; but you, who may look forward with hope to long years of life, must bethink you at once of the new path before you. Arouse yourself, then, to the task, and I do not know but I may be prouder of you yet, buffeting the wild waves of adversity, and fighting the manful part of a bold, courageous spirit, than I have ever been in seeing you in the brilliant circle of all your high and titled acquaintances. Ay, George, the English merchant never died out in my heart, for all the aristocratic leaven which accident mixed up with my fortunes. I never ceased to glory in the pride of wealth accumulated by generous enterprises and honourable toil. I loved the life of labour that disciplined the faculties, and exercised not alone intelligence, but turned to use the gentler charities of life, linking man to man, as brethren journeying the same road, with different burdens, perhaps, but with the same goal. For myself, therefore, I have few cares. It remains with you to make them even fewer."

"Tell me what you propose for me, sir," said George in a low, weak voice.

"First of all, George, you ought to leave the army.

Grounsell, I must tell you, is not of this opinion; he advises an exchange into a regiment in India, but I think differently. To repair, if it be possible, the shattered wreck of our fortunes, you must address yourself to business life and habits. You'll have to visit the West Indies, and, probably, the East. We still possess property in Ceylon, of value; and our coffee plantations there, as yet only in their infancy, need nothing but good management to ensure success. Grounsell laughed at my suggesting you for such duties, but I know you better, George, far better, than *he* does. The English pluck that storms a breach or heads a charge is the very same quality that sustains a man on the long dark road of adverse fortune. I have often told Grounsell that the stuff was in you, George."

The young man squeezed his father's hand, but was obliged to turn away his head to hide the tears which filled his eyes; for what a terrible deception was he practising at that very moment, and what duplicity was there even in the silence with which he heard him!

For a few seconds Sir Stafford seemed to revel in all the bright visions of a warm fancy. The prospect his imagination had conjured up appeared to have momentarily lifted him above the reach of sorrow. He thought of his son engaged in the active business of life, and displaying in this new career the energies and resources of a bold and courageous spirit. He imagined the high-principled youth becoming the British merchant, and making the name of "Onslow" great and respected in the old arena of all their victories—the city of London. Could this but come to pass—were this dream to be realized—and he would bless the hour that wrecked his fortune, and thus made his poverty the foundation of future greatness.

"I confess, George," said he, "that I have a pride in thinking that I knew you better than others did, and that I read in the very wayward caprices of your disposition the impatience of an active mind, and not the ennui of an indolent one." From this the old man branched off into his plans for the future; and, as if the emergency had suggested energy, talked well and clearly of all that was to be done. They were to start for England at once. Sir

Stafford felt as if he was able to set out that very day. Some weeks would elapse before the crash came, and in the interval every preparation might be taken. "I hope," said he, feelingly, "that I have few enemies; I am not sanguine enough to say, none; but, such as they are, they will not seek to humiliate me, I trust, by any unnecessary publicity." The theme was a very painful one, and for a few seconds he could not go on. At last he resumed: "The extravagance of this household, George, will give much and just offence. It must be retrenched, and from this very day, from this very hour. You will look to this. It must not be said of us that, with ruin before us, we continued these habits of wasteful excess. Let these troops of idle servants be discharged at once. Except Lady Hester's carriage, sell off all equipage. Take no heed of what will be the town talk; such a downfall as ours can never be kept a secret. Let us only take care that we fall with dignity. Grounsell will remain here after us to settle everything, and our departure ought to be as speedy as may be. But you are not listening, George; do you hear me?"

It was quite true George heeded little of what his father spoke; for, with bent-down head, he was trying to catch the sounds of what seemed a long, low whistle from the court without. As he listened, the whistle was repeated; he knew now that it was Norwood's signal, and that "his time was up."

"I must leave you, my dear father," said he, assuming all that he could of calmness. "I have an appointment this morning, and one that I cannot well shake off. Norwood and I have promised to meet some friends at Pratolino."

"It was of that same Norwood I wished to speak to you, George. The sophistry of thinking him 'no worse than his set' will serve no longer. Such men are not fitting acquaintances for one whose character must be above reproach. Norwood is a most unworthy friend for you."

"I scarcely ever thought of him in that light. We are intimate, it is true; but such intimacy is not friendship."

"The greater the pollution of such acquaintanceship, then," said the old man, gravely. "To see the dark side of such a nature, and yet live under its baneful shadow, is infinitely worse, George, than all the self-deception of a rash confidence. Keep your promise to-day, but I beseech you let it be for the last time in such company."

Again the whistle was heard, and with the sharp crack of a whip, denoting impatience; and fearful that some accident might betray his secret, George clasped the old man's hand fervidly within his own, and hurried away without a word.

"Is that George?" cried Norwood, as he stood beside a calessino ready harnessed, and with lamps lighted, for the morning was still dark—"is that George? Why, where have you been loitering this half-hour, man? Our time is six sharp, and it is now considerably past five, and the way lies all up hill."

"I have often done the distance in half an hour," said George, angrily.

"Perhaps the errand was a pleasanter one," rejoined Norwood, laughing; "but jump in, for I feel certain the others are before us."

George Onslow was in no mood for talking as he took his seat beside his companion; the late scene with his father and the approaching event were enough to occupy him, even had his feeling for Norwood been different from what it was, but in reality never had he experienced the same dislike for the viscount. All the flippant ease, all the cool indifference he displayed, were only so many offences to one whose thoughts were traversing the whole current of his life, from earliest boyhood down to that very moment. A few hours hence he might be no more! And thence arose to his mind the judgments men would pass upon him, the few who would speak charitably, the still fewer who would regret him. "What a career," thought he; "what use to have made of fortune, station, health, and vigour—to have lived in dissipation, and die for a street brawl! And poor Kate! to what unfeeling scandal will this unhappy meeting expose *you!* how impossible to expect that truth will ever penetrate through

that dark atmosphere of mystery and malevolence the world will throw over the event."

Norwood was provoked at the silence, and tried in various ways to break it. He spoke of the road, the weather, the horse's trotting action, the scenery—over which the breaking day now threw fitful and uncertain lights—but all in vain; and at last, piqued by non-success, he spitefully pointed attention to a little valley beside the road, and said, "Do you see that spot yonder, near the pine-trees?—that's where Harry Mathews was shot. Malzahn sent the bullet through the brain at forty paces. They were both first-rate pistol-shots, and the only question was who should fire first. Harry determined to reserve his shot, and he carried the privilege into the other world with him. Malzahn knew he might trust his skill, and fired the very instant he took his ground. The moral of which is—always try and have first fire with a foreigner."

"I heard the sound of wheels behind us; who are they?" said George, not heeding either the story or the counsel.

"The doctor, I suspect. I ordered a calessino to wait for him at the door of the palace, and bring him up as fast as possible."

"If Guilmard be equal to his reputation, we shall not want his services," said Onslow with a faint smile.

"Who can tell? We'll put you up at a short distance, and there's nothing shakes the nerves of your practised pistol-shot more than ten or twelve paces."

The road here became so steep that they were obliged to get down and walk for some distance, while the horse toiled slowly up behind them. As they went, Norwood continued to talk on incessantly of this, that, and t'other, as though bound to occupy the attention of his companion, while George, with half-closed eyes, strolled onward, deep in his own thoughts.

"We're not far off the place now, George," said Norwood at last, "and I wish you'd throw off that look of care and abstraction. These foreign fellows will be quite ready to misinterpret it. Seem at your ease, man, and take the thing as I have seen you take it before—as rather good fun than otherwise."

"But that is precisely what I do not feel it," said

George, smiling quietly. "Twenty-four hours ago, when life had every possible advantage to bestow on me, with the prospect of an ample fortune before me, I was perfectly ready to turn out with any man who had the right to ask me; and now that I am ruined——"

"Ruined!" broke in Norwood; "what do you mean? You have not lost to that Greek fellow so largely as that?"

"Now that my father is on the verge of utter ruin," repeated George, slowly—"the news came last night—I never felt the desire of life so strong within me. A few days or weeks more will make it public gossip, so I may tell you that we have not escaped the torrent that is sweeping away so many of the richest houses in Europe; and what between our immense liabilities and my father's scrupulous sense of honour, the chances are we shall be utterly beggared."

"The devil!" exclaimed Norwood, whose thoughts at once reverted to his own claims on George, and the unpaid acceptances he still held of his.

"That's what I feel so strange," said George, now speaking with a degree of warmth and interest, "that it should be exactly when life ceases to give promise that I should care for it; and I own to you, I'd give anything that this meeting was not before me."

Norwood started, and turned his keen eyes on the other, but in the calm, unmoved features he saw no traces of fear or even agitation; and it was in his habitually calm voice Onslow resumed,—

"Yes, I wish the count's hand would shake a little, Norwood. I'd be most grateful to the bullet that would take to the right or the left of me."

"Come, come, George, no more of this. We are alone here, it's true; but if you talk this way now, you may chance to look like it by-and-by."

"And if I do not, my looks will strangely belie my sentiments, that I can tell you," said Onslow, with a quiet laugh. "I don't care how you read the confession, Norwood, but I tell you frankly, that if the insult in this instance admitted of an apology—if there were any way to come off consistent with honour—I'd take it, and not fight this Frenchman."

"Have you forgotten his reputation as a shot?" asked Norwood, hastily.

"I was not thinking of it. My mind was dwelling merely on myself and my own interests—how far my life, if preserved, could be rendered useful to others, and in what way my death might occasion detriment and injury."

"A most mercantile estimate of profit and loss, by Jove!" said Norwood, laughing; "and perhaps it is fortunate for you there is no *amende* possible, for if Guilmard should miss you——"

"As to these acceptances," said George, not paying attention to what the other said, "I'd prefer that they should not be presented to my father under our actual circumstances. My horses and carriages, and some other trumpery of mine, when sold, will more than meet them, and I have given orders to that end."

"Come, old fellow, it's not gone that far yet," said Norwood, affecting a tone of friendship, suggested by the self-satisfaction the promise of payment afforded him. "But, hush! There they are, all together. Let us talk no more of these matters; and now, George, for Heaven's sake, be cool."

Norwood drew the other's arm within his own as he said this, and advanced to where a group of some half-dozen persons were standing, beside a low balcony, overlooking the Val d'Arno and the graceful valley in which Florence stands. Norwood quitted his friend's arm as he came forward and saluted the company. Nothing could possibly be more easy and unconstrained than the tone of their conversation, as they chatted away about the prospect beneath, and over which, like a gauzy veil, the grey shadow of dawn was hanging. With the exception of an Italian or two, they were all French—the young fashionables who were the loungers of the *salons* and *cafés* of the city.

"Have you breakfasted, my lord?" said one. "If not, let me recommend some excellent cutlets, which are not too cold, even yet."

"And the best chocolate I ever tasted out of Paris," cried another.

"Thanks," said Norwood. "We'll profit by the good counsel." And, taking a cigar from his case, he lighted it from Guilmard's, as, with hands in his paletot, he sat negligently on the wall, surveying the scene below him.

"Come, George, let's have something," whispered Norwood, eagerly, for the vacant and unoccupied stare of Onslow continued to cause the viscount the most intense anxiety. "These fellows are affecting to be devilish cool. Let us not be behindhand." And, rather by force than mere persuasion, he dragged Onslow along, and entered the little parlour of the inn.

A large table, covered with the remains of an ample breakfast, stood in the middle of the room, and a dish of cutlets was placed to keep hot before the stove. Several loose sheets of paper lay scattered about the table, on which were scrawled absurd and ill-drawn caricatures of duels, in which attitudes of extravagant fear and terror predominated. Norwood glanced at them for a moment, and then contemptuously threw them into the fire.

"Sit down, George," said he, placing a chair for the other; "and, if you cannot eat, at least take a 'nip' of brandy. Jekyl will be up, I suppose, in a few minutes. I told him to come with the doctor."

"I never felt an appetite at this early hour," said Onslow; "and perhaps the present is not the time to suggest one."

"Did you remark Guilmard?" said Norwood, as he helped himself to a cutlet, and prepared his plate most artistically for a savoury meal. "Did you observe him, George?"

"No; I never looked that way."

"By Jove! he has got a tremendous scar on his cheek. The whole length, from the eye to the corner of his mouth. English knuckles do not certainly improve French physiognomy. A left-hander, eh?"

"I remember nothing about it," said Onslow, carelessly.

"Well, you've left him a memorandum of the transactioo, any way," said the viscount, as he ate on. "And yun were talking about an apology a while ago?"

"I was wishing that the case admitted of one," said Onslow, calmly.

Norwood gave a sidelong glance at the speaker, and, although he said nothing, a gesture of angry impatience revealed what was passing within him.

"Do try that brandy. Well, then, take a glass of curaçoa," said he, pushing the bottle towards him.

"Something! anything, in fact, you would say, Norwood, that might serve to make my courage 'carry the bead;' but you are altogether mistaken in me. It is not of myself I am thinking; my anxieties are—— But what could you care, or even understand, about my motives? Finish your breakfast, and let us make an end of this affair."

"In one minute more I'm your man; but if I have a weakness, it is for a plain roast truffle, with butter. It was a first love of mine, and, as the adage says, 'only revient toujours.' Were I in your shoes this morning, George, I'd not leave one on the dish."

"On what principle, pray?" asked Onslow, smiling.

"On that of the old cardinal, who, when his doctors pronounced his case hopeless, immediately ordered a supper of ortolans with olives. It was a grand opportunity to indulge without the terror of an indigestion; and *à propos* to such themes, where can our worthy doctor be all this time? The calessino was close up with us all the way."

Leaving Norwood to continue his meal, George strolled out in quest of the surgeon, but none had seen nor knew anything of him. An empty calessino was standing on the roadside, but the driver only knew that the gentleman who came with him had got out there, and entered the park.

"Then we shall find him near the little lake," said Norwood, coolly, as George returned, disappointed. "But it's strange, too, that he should be alone. Jekyl was to have been with him. These foreigners ever insist upon two seconds on either side. Like the gambler that always is calling for fresh cards, it looks very like a suspicion of foul play. Go back, George, and see if the fellow knows nothing of Jekyl. You've only to name him, for every

cab, cad, and barcaruolo of Florence is acquainted with Master Albert."

George returned to the spot, but without any success. The man stated that he took his stand, as he was desired, at the gate of the palace, and that a little man, apparently somewhat elderly, came out, and asked which way the others had gone, and how long before they had started. "See that you pick them up, then," said he, "but don't pass them. He talked incessantly," added the man, "the whole way, but in such bad Italian that I could make nothing of it, and so I answered at random. If I were tired of *him*, I fancy he was sick of *me;* and when he got out yonder, and passed into the park, it was a relief to us both."

George was just turning away, when his eye caught a glimpse of the glorious landscape beneath, on which a freshly-risen sun was shedding all its splendour. There are few scenes, even in Italy, more striking than the Val d'Arno around Florence. The beautiful city itself, capped with many a dome and tower, the gigantic castle of the Bargello, the graceful arch of the Baptistery, the massive façade of the Pitti, all, even to the lone tower on the hill where Galileo watched, rich in their storied memories; while on the gentle slope of the mountain stood hundreds of beauteous villas, whose very names are like spells to the imagination, and the Dante, the Alfieri, the Boccaccio, vie in interest with the sterner realities of the Medici, the Pazzi, the Salviati, and the Strozzi. What a flood of memory pours over the mind, to think how every orange-grove and terrace, how each clump of olives, or each alley of cedars, have witnessed the most intense passions, or the most glorious triumphs of man's intellect or ambition, and that every spot we see has its own claim to immortality!

Not in such mood as this, however, did Onslow survey the scene. It was in the rapt admiration of its picturesque beauty. The glittering river, now seen and lost again, the waving tree-tops, the parterres of bright flowers, the stately palaces, whose terraces were shadowed by the magnolia, the oleander, and the fig, all made up a picture of rich and beautiful effect, and he longed to throw him-

self on the deep grass and gaze on it for hours. As he stood thus, unable to tear himself away, he heard the sharp cracking of a postilion's whip immediately beneath him, and, on looking down, saw two heavily-laden travelling-carriages, which all the power of eight horses to each could barely drag along against the steep ascent. A mounted courier in advance proclaimed that the travellers were persons of condition, and everything about the equipages themselves indicated wealth and station. As Onslow knew all who moved in a certain class in society, he was curious to see who was journeying northward so early in the year, and, stepping into a little copse beside the road, he waited for the carriages to pass.

They came slowly forward—now halting to "breathe" the weary horses, now struggling for a brief space against the hill—and at last, turning a sharp angle of the way, the first carriage drew short up, directly in front of where he stood. The panels bore the flaunting and pretentious arms of Prince Midchekoff, with many an armorial emblem, which, however tolerated in the rest of Europe, the Czar would not suffer within his own dominions. As George glanced at these, he started, for a well-known voice caught his ear, and, forgetting his desire of concealment, he leaned forward to listen. It was Kate was speaking; he could not hear the words, but the accents were her own. "Oh, for one look at her—for the last time!" thought he; and dashed headlong through the copse towards where, by another bend, the road made a rapid turn upwards.

Already the horses had regained their wind, and were away at a brisk trot, as George tore onward through the closely interwoven branches and thick underwood of the grove. There was no path, nor, once out of sight or sound of the road, anything to guide him; but he dashed on, in the direction he supposed the carriage must take. At every step the way grew more intricate and difficult; the pits the peasants dig for chestnut leaves, the little heaps collected for firewood, intercepted him at each moment. With torn clothes and bleeding hands he still rushed madly, resolutely bent upon his object; and, with many a bruise and many a scar, at last gained the open

country, just in time to see the second carriage crowning the peak of the mountain above his head, while he could hear the sharp, clanking sound of the drag as they fastened it to the leading carriage. Any attempt to overtake them on the hill must now be hopeless. He well knew the pace at which a continental postilion descends a mountain, and how the steepest galleries of Alps and Apennines are often galloped down at speed. For miles below him he could see the winding zigzags of the road, and at each turning he fancied how he might catch sight of her. The mountain itself was terraced with vineyards from base to summit; but, from the steepness of its side, these terraces were but narrow strips of ground, barely sufficient for the vine-dresser to pass when tending his plants, or gathering in their produce. To look down on this giant stair—for such it seemed—was a giddy sensation, and few could have surveyed the precipitous descent without a sense of danger. Onslow's thoughts, however, had but one object—to see Kate once, and for the last time. By a straight descent of the mountain, leaping from terrace to terrace, it was possible for him to reach the bottom before the carriages could traverse the winding course of the road; and no sooner was the thought conceived than he proceeded to execute it. It is difficult to convey to those who have never seen these terraced flights of earth a true notion of the peril of such an undertaking; but they who have beheld them will acknowledge that little short of utter recklessness could dare it. Less leaping than dropping from height to height, the slightest impulse will carry the footsteps beyond the edge of the terrace, and then all self-control is lost, and destruction, to every appearance, inevitable.

The youth whose nerves have been trained by the sports of fox-hunting and deer-stalking, however, is seldom unprepared for sudden danger; and George never hesitated when once the undertaking seemed practicable. By sidelong leaps he descended the first three or four terraces well and safely. Impressed with the risk of the exploit, he never turned his eyes from the spot whereon he meant to alight, and measured every bound with accuracy. Suddenly, however, his attention was caught by the postilion's

bugle sounding, several hundred feet below him, and, in a bend of the road, he saw the dust left by the fast-descending carriage. Forgetful of safety—of everything, save his object—he leaped at random, and with a tremendous bound cleared one terrace completely, and alighted on the one beneath it. The impulse drove him forwards, and ere he could recover, he was on the very verge of the cliff. Even yet his presence of mind might have rescued him, when the loose masonry gave way, and carried him down with it. He fell forwards, and headlong; the force of the descent carried him on, and now, half-falling, half-struggling, he bounded from height to height, till, shattered, maimed, and bleeding, he rolled, an unconscious heap of clay, in the long grass of the valley.

Not fifty yards from where he lay, the carriages passed, and Kate even leaned from the window to gaze upon the winding glen, little thinking how terrible an interest that quiet scene was filled with. And so the equipages held their speed, and pressed onward; while, with a faint breathing, poor George lay, sleeping that dreamless slumber that seems a counterfeit of death.

END OF VOL. I.

Woodfall & Kinder, Printers, Milford Lane, Strand, London, W.C.

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